

THE PRAETORIAN GUARD IN
THE POLITICAL AND SOCIAL LIFE
OF JULIO-CLAUDIAN ROME

by

Sandra J. Bingham

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ABSTRACT

The imperial praetorian guard was an elite unit of the Roman army, whose primary responsibility was to safeguard the emperor and his family. Adapted from a republican institution by Augustus, it in essence formed the personal army of the emperor. Yet, within a very short time, the praetorians became responsible for specialized military tasks involving issues of security, and for various administrative duties in Rome. This evolution occurred primarily because of the close relationship between the guard and the emperor, who saw that such a large number of soldiers in the city could be put to good use for his own benefit, and for the advantage of the state. Not only would they assist in the management of the capital, they also would serve as a constant reminder to the populace of the substantial armed force that formed the basis of imperial rule.

Previous studies of the guard have concentrated on its organization and role as the imperial bodyguard. Yet it is through an examination of the other responsibilities of the praetorians that a more comprehensive understanding of their position in the state can be deduced. The purpose of the present study is to examine those aspects of the guard that are outside its basic mandate of providing protection for the imperial household. The development of the praetorians into a unit that carried out political espionage, fought fires in the city, and was employed as security at the games provides insight into the nature of the early principate, which relied on armed force to maintain its authority. The expanded role of the guard in the Julio-Claudian period can be viewed as the

deliberate integration of the military into the fabric of Roman administration. By placing soldiers who owed their allegiance only to him in key roles in the capital, the emperor was able to consolidate his hold on power while, at the same time, often providing much needed services that benefited the state as a whole.

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I. Introduction

The praetorian guard was one of the most distinctive features of imperial rule. An elite unit of soldiers, these men were responsible for the safety of the Roman emperor and his family, and were well rewarded for their loyalty. They received a higher rate of pay than the rest of the army, they had better living and working conditions because they were based in Rome, and their close relationship with the emperor singled them out as the most privileged group among the military. Under the republic, troops had not been allowed in the capital, and the presence of the praetorian guard in Rome under Augustus was one of the most striking – and visible – indications that the imperial period had begun.

It was their proximity to the imperial administration that provided the impetus for the development of the praetorians into much more than a bodyguard. As early as the reign of Augustus, there was a realization that having so many soldiers close to the capital meant they could be used in any number of circumstances requiring large numbers of trained personnel. The evolution of the praetorians into a unit which fought fires, provided security at the games, and carried out political espionage can best be explained by the practicality of making use of the troops in the city as part of the overall organization of civil administration.

The guard itself has not received much attention of late. Since the publication of the monumental work by Marcel Durry in 1938, *Les Cohortes Praetoriennes*, followed closely by Alfredo Passerini's *Le Coorti Pretorie* (1939), there has been no comprehensive study of the early years of the guard.¹ Durry's book provides a detailed overview, concentrating on the organization of the cohorts (the command structure, arms and insignia, recruitment), and the social aspects of the praetorian community (the duration of service, the various duties of the soldiers and officers, their families and religion). He also includes a brief general history of the guard, from Augustus to Constantine. There is, however, virtually no analysis of the responsibilities which the guard had in the capital, and such tasks as policing the games are dealt with in a portion of a single sentence, without further examination.² Yet an examination of how the praetorians came to be involved in such tasks adds much to our understanding of the history of the guard and its development into such a significant force in the middle and late empire. Durry's work in particular is often cited as the definitive study of the praetorians, but new evidence has shown that some of his

¹ For a review of Durry, see Syme (1939), 242-248; of Passerini, see Davis (1939), 255-56. These reviews, although dated, nevertheless provide some idea of the shortfalls of the books, and reinforce the need for a reassessment of the guard. Evans (1986) examined the guard in some detail, but from the perspective of a retired soldier, and his book contains many errors and omissions.

² Durry (1938), 278: "Une cohorte entière surveille régulièrement théâtre et cirque, afin de réprimer les violences qui y sont fréquentes . . ."

assumptions are incorrect and, in fact, there are minor errors throughout the entire work.³

Passerini's book concentrates more on the praetorian prefects than the cohorts, though he also briefly discusses the organization of the guard, emphasizing certain aspects such as the conditions of service and the granting of donatives. His view of the praetorians is that they were an outstanding military force, but his arguments for their battle-worthiness cannot be substantiated.⁴ Passerini too provides a brief history of the unit, but the entire second half of the book is given over to a discussion of the prefects, including a list of those who held the position from Augustus to Constantine. His work has been criticized, however, for its lack of in-depth analysis, and is less often cited as a general source for the guard.⁵

Since the publication of Durry, there has been no further comprehensive study of the guard, and only piecemeal examinations of various aspects of its organization, often included in general discussions of the Roman military.⁶ Most

³ For example, his text of the inscription for Vettius Valens has the soldier serving in the XVI cohort of the *vigiles* when, in fact, there were only seven cohorts. He also claims that the praetorians were involved in the younger Agrippina's murder, though they were not. Cf. Durry (1938), 132-33; 279.

⁴ See the criticisms of Davis (1939), 255.

⁵ Davis (1939), 255 notes that Passerini does not discuss "the immense effect that the prefecture of a man like Seianus must have had upon the conception of their [i.e. the prefects'] duties held by his successors; nor of how much depended, because of their close contact with the emperor, upon the personality of the prefects." Yet it is precisely this relationship between prefect and emperor that helps to explain in part the direction that the guard took in the early part of their history.

⁶ See, for example, Davies (1989); Grant (1974); Campbell (1984); Keppie (1984); Webster (1985); Le Bohec, (1994).

modern scholarship on the praetorians is based on citations from Durry. General histories of the empire usually include information on the unit, but only as the official bodyguard of the emperor, sometimes with reference to their privileged position in Rome.⁷ Biographies of emperors also make mention of the guard, though without much consideration of its role in the events of the reign. In the case of the Julio-Claudian period, for example, in English alone, Barbara Levick's books on Tiberius and Claudius, A.A. Barrett's book on Caligula, and Miriam Griffin's book on Nero all have reason to refer to the praetorians, but it is only rarely that there is any in-depth analysis of the role which the guard had in the episodes that are discussed.⁸ This is not surprising, since the emphasis of their works is on the individual emperors themselves rather than on an examination of the entire imperial system, but it is also the case that such works can continue to perpetuate certain dated ideas about the praetorians.⁹

A fresh assessment of the early history of the praetorian guard is therefore long overdue. The genesis of the unit was in the republican period. In the middle of the first century BC, the praetorian cohort, which had functioned solely as a

⁷ As in Christ (1984), or Garzetti (1974).

⁸ Levick (1976), (1990), *passim*; Barrett (1990), *passim*; Griffin (1984), *passim*. One could also include Seager (1972), Balsdon (1934b), Ferrill (1991), Bishop (1964), and Grant (1970), among others. Though their focus is not on individual emperors, Barrett's recent book on Agrippina (1996) and Griffin's book on Seneca (1984) can be added to this list.

⁹ One such instance concerns the increase in the number of cohorts from nine to twelve, now generally accepted to have occurred under Tiberius, but often mentioned in connection with either Caligula or Claudius. The reason is that Durry (1938), 79, following Mommsen, placed the reference to the increase in the lacuna in *Tacitus' Annals*. See, for example, Barrett (1990), 159.

bodyguard for commanders in the field, began to change and to take on more administrative tasks. The civil wars that erupted shortly thereafter halted this progression, and the cohorts reverted to being primarily a military force. But when Augustus decided to institute an armed unit for his personal use, he brought together both aspects of the republican guard, making his imperial praetorians function not only in a military, but also in an administrative capacity. Throughout the Julio-Claudian period, there was an increasing reliance on these soldiers for tasks beyond the guarding of the imperial family, though most aspects of this expanding role did not necessarily attract much notice, since the change happened gradually. Moreover, this progression parallels to a certain extent the increased administrative power that the position of praetorian prefect gained in the first century AD.

It is virtually impossible to discuss the development of the functions of the guard without examining in some detail the men who commanded it. It was partially due to the capabilities of its prefects that the praetorians were given the opportunity to become involved even more fully in administrative tasks in the city itself. Such figures as Sejanus, Macro and Burrus all had great sway with the emperors under whom they served, and it was undoubtedly because of their influence that the cohorts were able to be put to greater use than simply serving as a bodyguard for the imperial family. Of course, they also could work against the system, as was the case with the last men who held the post under the Julio-

Claudians, Tigellinus and Nymphidius Sabinus. There is no comprehensive work on this early period, however. Howe's book on the prefects from Commodus to Diocletian deals only briefly with the history of the position and its military and judicial functions prior to the late second century, though he does point out that the office of prefect developed slowly over time "until a mere deputy commander of a single, if vitally important, army unit became second only to the emperor in authority."¹⁰

The purpose of this thesis, then, is to re-examine the imperial praetorian guard in its earliest period, that is, under the Julio-Claudian emperors. The origin of the guard as well as its organization – the number of men, rate of pay, and length of service – will be briefly discussed, along with the historical background. Issues which are controversial, or for which new evidence has emerged since the publication of Durry's book – for example, the increase in the number of cohorts and the effective of each – will be examined in greater detail. But the major focus of this work will be the development of the guard from a predominantly military force to that of an administrative unit used for a wide variety of tasks.

The placement of the praetorians in Rome and their close relationship with the emperor contributed to this adaptation. Such change was driven largely by the necessity of accommodating the requirements of the government which, at

¹⁰ Howe (1966²), 11. For the history of the prefecture, see 2-32.

this time, was essentially a dictatorship relying on the military for support.¹¹

Although their primary function was to provide protection for the emperor and his family, from the beginning the praetorians were assigned to other duties related to the issue of imperial security. They acted as a strategic military force sent to deal with problems where other measures had proven ineffectual, or where there was a need for covert activity. A division of the guard, the *speculatores*, became specifically associated with clandestine action. The praetorians were also involved with the arrest, confinement and execution of those deemed to be a threat to the state. On the other hand, they were also part of the routine civil administration in the capital, assisting the *vigiles* in fire-fighting, and acting as security at the games and theatre. The guard was able to be employed in these tasks precisely because it was the emperor's personal unit and could therefore be adapted to whatever need he had of his soldiers.¹²

Throughout this period, the soldiers proved to be pragmatic concerning this relationship, carrying out whatever demands were made of them, and showing themselves unwilling to jeopardize their privileged position.¹³

¹¹ As noted by Dio 53.11. Cf. Campbell (1994), 183: "In Dio's view the maintenance of the privileged praetorian guard and the fact that the provinces controlled directly by Augustus contained most of the troops, demonstrated the dichotomy between appearance and reality in imperial politics, since real power depended on control of the army."

¹² As Saddington (1990), 3496 notes "What needs stressing [about the guard] is its 'incidental use', revealed by chance remarks in Tacitus. The emperors found it particularly useful to use small groups of praetorians, usually under the command of centurions but also of tribunes, to carry out routine or special missions."

¹³ Cf. Campbell (1984), 117, who observes that since the actions of the praetorians were guided by gain and the desire to secure their position, they in general supported the emperor.

Contemporary information about the praetorians is often restricted, however, because it was usually not in the emperor's best interest that their activities be publicized. As a result, they are frequently overlooked by the sources for the period.¹⁴ This makes the historian's job that much more difficult. The development of a military unit belonging to the army but superior to them in status and functioning as a separate entity answering only to the emperor, did not lend itself to close scrutiny. In the imperial period of Rome that such a group existed should not surprise anyone. After all, most governments whose authority relies on intimidation by the military have had an elite force which functions in a similar fashion. But the way in which the praetorian guard adapted to the needs of the imperial household as the empire progressed is a topic that has not received enough attention, and the beginnings of this change will be examined in this work.

¹⁴ On the sources, see Appendix 1, "The Sources for the Julio-Claudian Period", 257-265.

II. The Guard in the Republic

The imperial praetorian guard was not an invention of the first princeps, but rather a modification of a republican institution. Prior to the institution of the imperial period, we find several references to armed men acting as a bodyguard for generals in the field, though it was not until the first century BC that the term *cohors praetoria* was applied in the sources to this type of unit, and the attribution was not then restricted to military applications.¹ But the basic idea remained the same: a corps of men chosen by the commander to be his guard and often to assist him in other capacities.

Festus records that the first praetorian cohort was formed by Scipio Africanus: *praetoria cohors est dicta, quod a praetore non discedebat. Scipio enim Africanus primus fortissimum quemque delegit, qui ab eo in bello non discederent et cetero munere militiae vacarent et sesquiplez stipendium acciperent.*² It is uncertain, however, whether he is referring to Scipio Africanus Maior or Scipio Aemilianus Africanus Numantius.³ Livy is cited in support of Scipio Africanus Maior, who took a bodyguard with him from Spain to Sicily in 205 BC. But the term *cohors* is not used in reference to the men chosen by him to serve in this capacity: *ex iis trecentos iuvenes, florentes aetate et virium robore insignes, inermes circa se habebat,*

¹ For a list of terms used and their sources, see Appendix 2, "Republican Terms for the Praetorian Cohort", 266-268.

² Lindsay (1965), 249.

³ For example, Passerini (1939), 9 argues for the elder Scipio whereas Mommsen (1879), 25 and Webster (1985), 45, note 4 prefer Aemilianus. Durry (1938), 71 refuses to hazard a guess.

*ignorantes quem ad usum neque centuriati neque armati servarentur.*⁴ Though the purpose of this group seems to correspond well to that of the praetorian cohort in the first century BC, the fact that they are unarmed, and the absence of any specific reference to *cohors*, prevents any secure correlation to be drawn with the text from Festus. The attribution of the innovation to Scipio Aemilianus also is not without difficulty, for the passage describing the corps he took with him to Spain in 134 BC makes it is clear that these troops were mounted: ἐπηγάγετο πελάτας ἐκ Ῥώμης καὶ φίλους πεντακοσίους, οὓς ἐς ἴλην καταλέξας ἐκάλει φίλων ἴλην.⁵ The correlation between *cohors* and ἴλη is not clear, though Mommsen proposed that *cohors* could refer to a group composed of infantry and cavalry, and thus argued that the passages from Festus and Appian are not in disagreement.⁶ Durry, however, argues that the use of *cohors* indicates that the unit described by Festus consisted of infantry from the beginning, though cavalry soon would have been associated with them.⁷ Therefore, the explanations proposed for one or the other Scipio do not resolve the problem since neither fits the standard definition of a praetorian cohort as an armed infantry unit. The possibility must be admitted that Festus was in error in

⁴ Livy 29.1.1. Cf. also Plutarch, *Fabius Maximus* 26.2.

⁵ Appian, *Hisp* 84.

⁶ Mommsen (1879), 27, note 3. Mason (1974), 56 lists *cohors* as an equivalent for ἴλη, but the passage from Appian is the only example of this, and Mommsen is cited as the source.

⁷ Durry (1938), 68; cf. also Passerini (1939), 5, note 1; 22. Durry (1938), 71 further adduces the issue of the rate of pay as given by Festus, arguing that *sesquiple* better fits the stipendium of infantry than of cavalry.

attributing the innovation to Scipio Africanus, projecting back to the period of the Punic Wars the connotation which the term had come to have by his time.⁸

This type of protection for commanders was deemed necessary in the second century BC because of the lax discipline in the armies. According to Livy, the dictator Postumius also had troops acting as his personal guard in an earlier period: *dictator Postumius postquam cecidisse talem virum, exsules ferociter citato agmine invehit, suos perculsos cedere animadvertit, cohorti suae, quam delectam manum praesidii causa circa se habebat, dat signum ut quem suorum fugientem viderint pro hoste habeant*.⁹ This personal cohort, in fact, may be a precursor to the group that Festus attributed to Scipio Africanus. Since the Roman army of the late republic was a volunteer force, those in charge needed to have men they could rely on in situations where there might have been danger to the commanders, especially when they were not certain that they could count on the majority of their troops.¹⁰

⁸ The origin of the designation "praetorian" for the cohort forming the commander's guard also has caused controversy. Most scholars accept that the word is related to *praetor*, though whether in connection with that official as a general in the field or as the governor of a province is uncertain. Cf. Durry (1938), 70. Mommsen (1900), 437, however, understood the word to be closely associated with the *praetorium*, or general's tent, of the camp, near which a guard would be stationed.

⁹ Livy 2.20.5. The date is circa 496 BC. Passerini (1939), 3, however, suggests that there had been no need for a bodyguard early on. Discipline was not a problem, he argues, since the army was comprised of citizens fighting wars against a common danger. Yet it is hard to reconcile this claim with the existence of a personal guard as early as the fifth century.

¹⁰ Webster (1985), 45, note 4 suggests that Scipio Aemilianus took the bodyguard with him because of uncertainty concerning the temperament of the army in Spain.

In the late second century BC, we hear of a cohort composed of friends and relatives of the commander rather than of soldiers, though sometimes still functioning as a bodyguard. It is possible that this type of unit was the same as the one that later became known as a *cohors amicorum*. Durry prefers to have only one cohort, sometimes called *praetoria*, sometimes *amicorum*.¹¹ But the composition of the corps necessarily would dictate whether this unit was exclusively military, and the distinction is therefore important. The group that was assembled by Scipio Aemilianus in 134 BC fits the description of a *cohors amicorum* well.¹² Only twelve years later, Gaius Gracchus is said to have had a bodyguard composed of partisans, which also suggests a *cohors amicorum*.¹³ Such units must have been common, for Sallust is careful to distinguish Marius' guard in Africa in 106 as military in composition: *cum turma sua quam ex fortissimis magis quam familiarissimis paraverat*.¹⁴ The *cohors amicorum* continues to be found throughout the late republic, though it is clear that this unit did not always function in a strictly military capacity.¹⁵ The *cohors amicorum* continued to exist

¹¹ Durry (1938), 72. Cf. also Passerini (1939), 28.

¹² Cf. Crook (1955), 25.

¹³ Appian, *BCiv* 1.25: ὑπὸ τῶν συνθεμένων δορυφορούμενος. Of course, Gracchus was a politician at the time, and not involved in military affairs.

¹⁴ Sallust, *Jugurtha* 98.1. Grant (1974), 88 attributes to Marius the innovation of a "regular military escort", but it seems clear that such a unit had existed before this time.

¹⁵ Cf. Catullus 10.10; Horace, *Satires* 1.7.23-25; Tibullus 1.3 and 1.7. Durry (1938), 73 lists several other examples, but errs in thinking that, despite the absence of the term *cohors praetoria* in any of the texts, these men were part of such a group. The lack of designation is indeed significant.

in the imperial period and eventually developed into the “immediate entourage of the emperor wherever he may be.”¹⁶

By the early first century BC, when the republic began to undergo radical changes, and there was a concomitant emphasis on the safety of the individual rather than the security of the state, bodyguards became a necessity. Sulla, for example, is said to have had a large group protecting him.¹⁷ It is also at this time that a military cohort specifically designated “praetorian” and employed as a bodyguard is first mentioned. In 63 BC, when Petreius (the proprator of North Italy) was fighting against Catiline, it is recorded that he led his praetorian cohort against the centre of the enemy, and routed them: *Petreius ubi videt Catilinam, contra ac ratus erat, magna vi tendere, cohortem praetoriam in medios hostis inducit . . .*¹⁸ Later, when he fought against Caesar, Petreius (now Pompey’s legate) had provided arms to his slaves to supplement a band of light-armed men which formed his bodyguard, referred to by Caesar as a praetorian cohort.¹⁹ The use of the term *cetratorum* to describe these men suggests, however, that they were not Romans but local Spanish troops, being used much as the German bodyguard would be later in the early imperial period. Caesar also had a corps of

¹⁶ Crook (1955), 25.

¹⁷ Appian, *BCiv* 1.100: φυλακὴν τοῦ σώματος περιέθετο πολλήν.

¹⁸ Sallust, *Catiline* 60.5.

¹⁹ Caesar, *BC* 1.75: *armat familiam; cum hac et praetoria cohorte cetratorum barbarisque equitibus paucis, beneficiariis suis, quos suae custodiae causa habere consuevit . . .* The date is 49 BC.

Spaniards as a guard, which he later dismissed.²⁰ Yet, even at this point, a praetorian cohort did not have to function strictly as a bodyguard for its commander. When Cicero was governor of Cilicia, his praetorian cohort was engaged in a battle against a force of Parthian and Arab cavalry, though he himself was not present.²¹ It seems that the corps, which was intended to serve as protection for the governor, could function independently of him.

It is unclear whether Caesar had a bodyguard that would have been equivalent to a praetorian cohort. The only contemporary reference to such a group is a passage in the *Gallic Wars* in which Caesar threatened to take the Xth legion as his personal bodyguard in advancing against Ariovistus if the rest of his troops refused to go.²² Two chapters later, Caesar records that he used the infantry of the Xth legion, which had been mounted, as a personal guard when he went to meet Ariovistus, because the terms of the meeting dictated that no infantry could accompany him and he was unwilling to trust his Gallic cavalry.²³

²⁰ Suetonius, *Divus Julius* 86; cf. Appian, *BCiv* 2.109. There were others who had had similar types of bodyguards, among them Marius, who brought with him to Rome a group of men referred to as *Bardylae* (Plutarch, *Marius* 43), Sertorius in Spain, who used a group of Celtiberians as a guard, for which the Roman soldiers with him felt slighted (Appian, *BCiv* 1.112), and Labienus, who had a mounted guard of Gauls and Germans in 46 BC (Caesar, *BAfr* 19).

²¹ Cicero, *Ad Fam* 15.4.7 The bodyguard had been stationed at Epiphanea by Cicero's predecessor; cf. Shackleton-Bailey (1977), 447.

²² Caesar, *BG* 1.40: *quod si praeterea nemo sequatur, tamen se cum sola decima legione iturum, de qua non dubitaret, sibi que eam praetoriam cohortem futuram . . .* The incident dates to 58 BC. Cf. also Dio 38.47.2. Keppie (1984), 84 argues that Caesar had been treating this legion as a praetorian cohort for some time, though without further comment.

²³ Caesar, *BG* 1.42. It is interesting that the praetorian cohort was comprised of soldiers taken directly from the legion. It is not always clear where the men who made up the bodyguards at this time came from, but this example may provide support for them originating in the rank and file. Cf. also Keppie (1984), 153. Military records of a later period illustrate the flexibility of such

These references to the use of part of a legion as a praetorian cohort have been interpreted as evidence that Caesar did not normally have such a unit at his disposal.²⁴ But he was in Gaul as governor, and must have had a group of men assisting him who technically would be referred to as his praetorian cohort, though perhaps they were not used in a military sense. In fact, Appian records that Caesar dismissed the praetorian cohorts that had been his bodyguard during the wars. This, however, is the only specific reference for the existence of such a group.²⁵ It is possible that the two thousand soldiers attending Caesar when, in 45, he visited Cicero in Puteoli may indicate that by then he did have a guard.²⁶

Although these praetorian cohorts were primarily military in character, on occasion they also functioned as an administrative unit. In his speech against Verres dating to 70 BC, Cicero makes several references to the governor's cohort. This group encompasses his staff, members of which were used in many different capacities.²⁷ The most common function seems to have been service in a

troops; men from an auxiliary unit stationed at Vindolanda were assigned to the governor, for example, to serve as his guard in London. See Bowman (1994), 52.

²⁴ Durry (1938), 75 notes that there is no reference in Caesar's works to a praetorian cohort despite the extensive narrative of manoeuvres and combat.

²⁵ Appian, *BCiv* 2.107. Mommsen argued for Caesar to have one praetorian cohort which Durry (1938), 74-5 associates with the young men who followed Caesar in hopes of making their name; cf. Caesar, *BG* 1.39.2. But these followers do not seem to have been organized into a formal unit.

²⁶ *Ad Att.* 13.52. Cicero was at Puteoli at the time. Cf. Speidel (1994), 15 who argues that at least some of the soldiers mentioned in the letter would have been mounted.

²⁷ Sometimes these duties were not exactly what might have been expected. For example, Verres was accused of sending some members of the praetorian cohorts to rob the temple of Hercules at Agrigentum: *ex domo atque ex cohorte praetoria manum fugitivorum instructam armatamque*. Cf. Cicero, *In Verrem* 2.4.94.

judicial capacity.²⁸ On one occasion, farmers from Agyrium had been brought up on false charges by one of Verres' henchmen, Apronius; the court which was to adjudicate the matter was chosen *ex cohorte praetoria*.²⁹ The fluidity of the term is reflected by Cicero in these speeches, for the praetorian cohort that assisted Verres included a wide assortment of people, and there is no overt military association.³⁰ A similar type of corps also is found with Cicero's brother Quintus when the latter was proconsul in Asia in 59 BC: *quos vero aut ex domesticis convictionibus aut ex necessariis apparitionibus tecum esse voluisti, qui quasi ex cohorte praetoris appellari solent . . .*³¹ In Cilicia, Cicero himself made use of his cohort (already seen engaged in battle) in his administrative duties, as is shown in one of his letters to Atticus.³² It is clear that, in the case of Cicero and Verres at least, the idea of a praetorian cohort encompassed much more than just the armed bodyguard of a general.³³ It was this fusion of military and administrative functions which laid the foundation for the imperial praetorian guard.

²⁸ Cicero, *In Verrem* 2.2.30: *cum hos sibi quaestus constituisset magnos atque uberes ex his causis quas ipse [Verres] instituerat cum consilio, hoc est cum sua cohorte . . .*; 2.2.34: *haec copia quam dico iudicum cohors, non Q. Scaevolae - qui tamen de cohorte sua dare non solebat - sed C. Verris.*

²⁹ Ibid 2.3.70.

³⁰ On Verres' praetorian cohort, see Bartosek (1977), 158-60.

³¹ Cicero, *Ad Q.f.* 1.1.12. His use of the genitive *praetoris* rather than the adjective *praetoria* is instructive, for it places emphasis on the association between the cohort and the governor rather than simply designating the type of unit.

³² *Ad Att.* 7.2.3: *eius testamentum deporto trium Ciceronem signis obsignatum cohortisque praetoriae.*

³³ A rather colourful use of the term occurs in the second Catilinarian oration in which Cicero refers to Catiline's *scortorum cohortem praetoriam*; see *In Cat.* 2.23.

After the death of Caesar in 44 BC, the contenders who fought for power all had bodyguards. For example, Appian reports that Decimus Brutus used a unit of Gallic cavalry, the only troops that did not desert him on the way to meet Marcus Brutus in Macedonia.³⁴ In some cases, these guards are referred to as praetorian cohorts. Both Octavian and Antony had such a corps. Octavian is said to have gathered almost ten thousand men to serve as his bodyguard: ἤγεν ἐς μυρίους ἄνδρας, οὔτε ὠπλισμένος ἐντελῶς οὔτε συντεταγμένους πω κατὰ ἴλας, ἀλλ' ὥς ἐς μόνην τοῦ σώματος φυλακὴν. . .³⁵ When this group showed their unwillingness to fight against Antony, Octavian used the promise of rewards to entice them not to abandon him. This use of inducement to ensure the loyalty of his soldiers is reminiscent of the donatives issued to the guard by the emperor throughout the imperial period.³⁶ Antony, on the other hand, had a contingent of men chosen from the army to be his praetorian cohort – those who were best in body and in character.³⁷ These men acted as his personal guard when he was

³⁴ Appian, *BCiv* 3.97. The date is 43 BC.

³⁵ Ibid 3.40; cf. also Suetonius, *Augustus* 10.3.

³⁶ Donatives in the republic generally were associated with triumphs, at which time the generals rewarded their troops with booty gained from battle. Cf. Maxfield (1986), 28.

³⁷ Appian, *BCiv* 3.45: αὐτὸς δ' ἐπιλεξάμενος ἐκ πάντων στρατηγίδα σπεῖραν ἀνδρῶν ἀρίστων τὰ τε σώματα καὶ τὸν τρόπον. Cf. also 3.50. This group is probably the "royal cohort" (σπεῖραν βασιλικὴν συνέταξεν ἀμφ' αὐτόν) and "private guard" (σιδηροφοροῦντες ἄνδρες ἐδορυφόρου) mentioned in Appian's reconstruction of Cicero's speech against Antony; cf. 3.52. See also Cicero, *Philippics* 8.8.25.

staying in Rome on his way to Ariminum and are referred to as his bodyguard by Appian.³⁸

Further mention of these cohorts is found in a letter dated 15 April 43 BC sent to Cicero by Galba, one of the participants in the battle of Forum Gallorum.³⁹ In addition to two legions, Antony is recorded to have led out two praetorian cohorts, one belonging to him, the other to Marcus Junius Silanus, who was either legate or tribune under Lepidus.⁴⁰ The same number was provided by the consul Hirtius as an additional guard for those marching from the camp to engage Antony; of these, one belonged to Hirtius, the other to Octavian.⁴¹ These troops, though nominally only bodyguards, took part in the fighting. There were losses on both sides, and Appian records that Octavian's entire cohort was destroyed.⁴²

Later in 43 BC, Octavian, Antony and Lepidus, having formed the second triumvirate, entered Rome. Each man was accompanied by a praetorian cohort and a legion.⁴³ The term used of the cohort (σὺν ταῖς στρατηγίσι τάξεσι) indicates that these soldiers were closely associated with the general, rather than

³⁸ Appian, *BCiv* 3.46: ἡ τοῦ σώματος φρουρά.

³⁹ Cicero, *Ad Fam.* 10.30. Cf. also Appian, *BCiv* 3.66-70.

⁴⁰ How (1962^o), 526.

⁴¹ How (1962^o), 525.

⁴² Appian, *BCiv* 3.70.

⁴³ *Ibid* 4.7. Millar (1973), 59 points out that the existence of these praetorian cohorts clearly distinguished the triumvirs from the consuls.

being a unit attached to the legion. In 42 BC, Domitius Calvinus sought to bring two legions and a praetorian cohort of two thousand men by sea to Octavian, who was fighting against Brutus and Cassius in Greece.⁴⁴ They were destroyed en route when the wind failed and they fell into enemy hands. The terminology here is similar to that used of the units with the triumvirs, emphasizing that these soldiers were intended for use by the general. The size of the group is important. In the late republic, it was not uncommon for a praetorian cohort to number in the thousands, which may have provided the precedent for the size of the cohorts set up by Augustus.

After the victory at Philippi, soldiers who had served their time were released by Antony and Octavian. But of these, eight thousand opted to remain active.⁴⁵ According to Appian, this group was divided between the two leaders and formed into praetorian cohorts: ὀκτακισχιλίων. οὓς δεηθέντας ἔτι στρατεύεσθαι σφίσιν ἀποδεξάμενοι διείλοντο καὶ συνελόχισαν ἐς στρατηγίδας τάξεις.⁴⁶ Durry refers to this as the “véritable naissance” of the guard.⁴⁷ It is not clear how many cohorts were created, but it is recorded that in 36 BC Antony had three with him when he fought against the Parthians.⁴⁸ Octavian also is said

⁴⁴ Appian, *BCiv* 4.115.

⁴⁵ Of those who were discharged, some were settled at Philippi, forming a new colony (Iulia Victrix Philippi). Coin evidence from the reign of Augustus indicates that among the settlers were former members of praetorian cohorts. See Keppie (1984), 121; 231 (and plate 16c); figure 1.

⁴⁶ Appian, *BCiv* 5.3; cf. also 5.59, where the praetorian cohorts thus formed meet again.

⁴⁷ Durry (1938), 76.

⁴⁸ Plutarch, *Antony* 39.2.

to have had praetorian cohorts with him in his conflict against Lucius Antonius, who earlier had been forced to get rid of a bodyguard made up of men from M. Antony's colonies.⁴⁹ The difference between Lucius Antonius as consul, who had no protection, and Octavian as triumvir, who had praetorian cohorts, is an important distinction: troops could now be "regularly stationed in Rome and Italy", though the commander of these men was not an elected official.⁵⁰

In 40 BC, riots occurred in Rome over additional taxation levied on the citizens in order to fund a war against Sextus Pompey. Octavian tried to quell the disorder, but was himself attacked.⁵¹ It is of note that the group that accompanied him to the Forum consisted of friends and attendants, not specified as soldiers (σὺν φίλοις καὶ ὀλίγοις ὑπασισταῖς). Clearly, he did not have a bodyguard with him at all times. Antony, who came to Octavian's rescue, also was assailed and troops had to be called in from outside the city. It is odd that, in this instance, the soldiers were not with their commanders, but encamped outside the walls. Where the praetorian cohorts were is not clear.⁵²

⁴⁹ Appian, *BCiv* 5.24; cf. 5.19-21. The date is 41 BC.

⁵⁰ Millar (1977), 61.

⁵¹ Appian, *BCiv* 5.68.

⁵² An incident recorded by Suetonius (*Augustus* 14) in which Octavian was attacked and nearly killed by soldiers for expelling one of their number from the games dates to the same period, and also illustrates Octavian's lack of protection. For another attack on Octavian, cf. Velleius Paterculus, *Histories* 2.79.

In the years leading up to Actium, both men continued to make use of praetorian cohorts. In 36 BC, Antony was in the east to fight the Parthians. As mentioned earlier, he had with him three praetorian cohorts as well as ten legions and cavalry. In the following year, Octavia sailed to meet Antony in Greece, bringing with her two thousand men to serve as his personal guard.⁵³ The importance of the praetorian cohorts to Antony in the east is emphasized on a coin issued by him.⁵⁴ Dio mentions that Cleopatra had Roman soldiers in her bodyguard, and it may be that these men came from among those praetorians who were serving as Antony's guard.⁵⁵

It is likely that the praetorian cohorts of both Antony and Octavian were involved in the fighting at Actium in 31 BC, though our only evidence for their participation comes from Orosius, who records that Octavian had five cohorts with him.⁵⁶ After his victory, Octavian took over Antony's cohorts, releasing many of these soldiers and settling them in new colonies.⁵⁷ Before long, however, Octavian had formed the majority of the soldiers from these cohorts into the imperial praetorian guard.

⁵³ Plutarch, *Antony* 53.2; cf. also Appian, *BCiv* 5.53; 95 (where the number is given as one thousand); Dio 49.33.4.

⁵⁴ Sydenham (1952), 1212; see figure 2. Cf. Keppie (1984), 127; 228 (and plate 12c). This coin, with the legend C(O)HORTIUM PRAETORIARUM, is the earliest physical evidence that we have for the term.

⁵⁵ Dio 50.5.1: στρατιώτας τε Ῥωμαίους ἐν τῷ δορυφορικῷ ἔχειν.

⁵⁶ Orosius 6.19.8.

⁵⁷ For example, at Gunugu in Mauretania; cf. Pliny, *NH* 5.20.

III. Augustus

Although it has been said that, except in name, the praetorian cohorts of the imperial period had very little in common with those of the republic, it seems obvious from the above survey that the events of the first century BC influenced the way in which Octavian structured his guard.¹ As noted already, Octavian incorporated those of Antony's soldiers who were not due for discharge into his own troops after Actium, and it is thought that many of these men became praetorians. How soon after 31 BC the transformation of the old republican praetorian cohorts into the imperial praetorian guard occurred is not recorded in our sources.

There is also no indication of the rationale behind the establishment of this unit by Augustus. The precedent of the republican cohorts may have provided the model, but there must have been some need that transformed what had been basically a bodyguard in the field to the emperor's guard in the capital. It has been pointed out that "[Augustus] had no illusions about the enemies he had made in his revolutionary career", and perhaps one need look no further than that for an explanation.² It is clear from the sources that the praetorians were for his personal use; Tacitus refers to them as the *proprius miles* of the princeps.³ But,

¹ *Name only*: Watson (1969), 16. Contra Nippel (1995), 91: "[The praetorians] evolved out of the elite units of bodyguards that the *triumviri* had employed during the civil wars."

² Campbell (1984), 112.

³ Tacitus, *Annals* 4.5.3.

even though these soldiers functioned as his personal army, Augustus did not restrict the responsibilities of the unit to serving as his bodyguard.⁴ The additional duties assigned to the men were probably an attempt by the emperor to make better use of the only sizable military force in Italy. The praetorian cohorts of governors such as Verres, therefore, which were engaged in administrative as well as military tasks are a better model for the imperial guard. This modification of the praetorian cohort from the late republic was a clear indication that the imperial period had begun.⁵

The date of the formal organization of the guard is conventionally accepted as 27 BC. This is the year in which Dio mentions the grant to the bodyguard of double the amount of pay which the rest of the troops received: καὶ παραυτίκα γε τοῖς δορυφορήσουσιν αὐτὸν διπλάσιον τὸν μισθὸν τοῦ τοῖς ἄλλοις στρατιώταις διδομένου ψηφισθῆναι διεπράξατο, ὅπως ἀκριβῆ τὴν φρουρὰν ἔχη.⁶ The establishment of a pay rate for the praetorians set higher than that of

⁴ Augustus had another group that better fits the description of a bodyguard, the *Germani corporis custodes*. These men replaced the Calagurritani that he had had up to the time of Actium, and they are mentioned occasionally in the sources for the Julio-Claudian period. Augustus dismissed them after the Varan disaster in AD 9, but they are attested again under Tiberius. They finally were disbanded by Galba. Tacitus (*Annals* 15.58.2) claims that it was because of their foreign character that the Germans were used as the personal bodyguard for the emperor, for they had no political interest in Rome. The most comprehensive work on this group is Bellen (1981). See also Speidel (1994), *passim*.

⁵ Nippel (1995), 91.

⁶ Dio 53.11.5. Durr (1938), 77 says that this act "sanctioned" the existence of the praetorian guard because the higher rate of pay was approved by the senate. Cf. also Campbell (1984), 110. Brunt (1950), 55, following Domaszewski, argues, however, that Dio has "misunderstood his authority" and he postulates that Augustus doubled the "existing rate of pay of praetorian soldiers" rather than paying them twice the rate of the legionaries.

the legions is perhaps the most obvious distinction between the guard and the rest of the army.⁷ The reason for this difference in pay is obvious: the praetorians were an elite unit, loyal only to the princeps, and the need to establish this clearly for the rest of the army and indeed for the populace as a whole was a lesson which Augustus had learned through the years of civil strife. It is possible that the additional duties assigned to the guard provided further impetus for the increase in pay, though the responsibility for the safety of the imperial family should have been enough for the emperor to ensure that the soldiers were well paid.⁸

Evidence for the number of cohorts, and the effective of each, is provided by Dio in his description of the forces that Augustus had at his disposal in AD 5: οἱ τε σωματοφύλακες μύριοι ὄντες καὶ δεκαχῆ τεταγμένοι.⁹ Much discussion has been generated by the discrepancies in the number of cohorts given by Dio and

⁷ The question of pay rates is a difficult one. The ratio of 5:3 has been proposed, based partly on a passage of Dio in which the discharge amounts for the soldiers are given, the praetorians receiving twenty thousand sesterces and the other troops twelve thousand. Cf. Dio 55.23.1; the year is AD 5. See also Watson (1969), 97-8. Soldiers who retired before this period had received land grants as, for example, to settle Augusta Praetoria in 24 BC. For a brief overview of the various arguments regarding pay rates, see Wolff (1986), 52-3.

⁸ There is only one donative recorded under Augustus, and it is not clear whether the guard benefitted. It occurred in 8 BC when the emperor granted money to the army on the occasion of Gaius Caesar taking part in their exercises. Cf. Dio 55.6.4. Tacitus, however, does comment that Augustus seduced the army with bonuses, though whether the guard were part of the largesse is not certain. See Tacitus, *Annals* 1.2.1: *militem donis . . . pellexit*. On donatives under the Julio-Claudians, cf. Passerini (1939), 114-116; Watson (1969), 109-110; LeBohec (1994), 214-217, who provides a chart listing all donatives granted to the army in the imperial period.

⁹ Dio 55.24.6. He distinguishes the praetorians from the urban cohorts, of which he lists four, each with an effective of fifteen hundred men (οἱ τῆς πόλεως ἑξακισχίλιοι τε ὄντες καὶ τετραχῆ νενεμημένοι).

that given by Tacitus, who records only nine cohorts before Vitellius.¹⁰ In fact, inscriptional evidence now shows that Tacitus erred in his account of the number of cohorts in AD 23, and that there were actually twelve in the reign of Tiberius.¹¹ The sequential numbering of the praetorian and urban cohorts, however, may provide proof of the original number established by Augustus, for the praetorians used I to IX and the urban X to XII.¹² It is possible that the additional cohort mentioned in Dio's account consisted of the special branch of the praetorians known as the *speculatores*.¹³

Where the praetorians were billeted under Augustus is not quite clear. Tacitus reports that the soldiers were scattered throughout the city prior to AD 23: *dispersas per urbem cohortis una in castra conducendo*.¹⁴ Suetonius, however, records that Augustus never kept more than three cohorts in the capital: *neque tamen umquam plures quam tres cohortes in urbe esse passus est easque sine castris, reliquas in hiberna et aestiva circa finitima oppida dimittere assuerat*.¹⁵ Since this was

¹⁰ Tacitus, *Annals* 4.5.3. For the Vitellian increase, see Tacitus, *Histories* 2.93.2.

¹¹ See below, "Tiberius", 43.

¹² Durry (1938), 78, followed by Keppie (1984), 153 suggests that the number of cohorts was set at nine to avoid any identification with the cohorts of a legion. Passerini (1939), 47 postulates that originally Augustus did not have any specific number of cohorts, but simply drew men as needed from those stationed near Rome. On the consecutive numbering between the guard and the urban cohorts, see Freis (1967), 36-37.

¹³ See below, "The Guard as a Specialized Military Unit", 124-175.

¹⁴ Tacitus, *Annals* 4.2.1.

¹⁵ Suetonius, *Augustus* 49; cf. also *Tiberius* 37.1. It is not known where those cohorts not yet stationed in the capital were located. Both Aquileia and Ostia have been proposed as possible sites, but the evidence is tenuous. Cf. Furneaux (1896), vol. 1, 213 (on Tacitus, *Annals* 1.124.1); Durry (1938), 44-45.

the first time that troops had been stationed in Rome itself, it may have been that Augustus considered it prudent to avoid placing so many armed men there in the early years of his reign.¹⁶ But, as the use of the guard increased because of the involvement of the praetorians in civil administration, and as the populace became accustomed to the presence of the soldiers in the city, it is conceivable that more of the cohorts would have been billeted in Rome to facilitate the coordination of their duties. Thus the discrepancy between Tacitus and Suetonius can be resolved. Suetonius is referring to the earliest period of Augustus' reign when the number of cohorts in the city was restricted to three, whereas Tacitus, whose discussion on this matter comes in his section on Sejanus, is recording the situation immediately prior to AD 23 when the cohorts were moved into the *Castra Praetoria* at the instigation of their prefect, that is, when most of the guard was billeted throughout the city but were not yet housed all together.¹⁷

¹⁶ Webster (1985), 45. Cf. also Campbell (1984), 111; (1994), 38 where he suggests that the absence of a dress uniform (the cohorts on duty at the palace wore togas) was "a political ploy designed to allay the fears of the senators who were unaccustomed to the presence of soldiers in Rome or indeed in Italy." Grant (1974), 89 offers another explanation for the dispersion: "... [Augustus] felt that the concentration of all nine cohorts in Rome would have constituted a danger rather than a protection to his life – and would have tempted other potential leaders to seduce its loyalty."

¹⁷ Despite the lack of specific designation for these cohorts in either author, it is clear from the contexts that these are praetorian and not urban cohorts. The urban cohorts must have been housed in Rome from their inception, given their responsibility for general security in the city, but the location is unknown and it is possible that they were billeted throughout the capital. In AD 23, however, they were assembled together with the praetorians in the *Castra Praetoria*.

The effective of one thousand given by Dio also has been questioned.¹⁸ But it seems clear that he would have recorded the number accurately, since he was well acquainted with the change in the guard which took place under Severus, namely the disbanding of the praetorians after his accession and their replacement by soldiers from the legions.¹⁹ Moreover, there is no evidence in any of the sources for an increase in the strength of the individual cohorts between Augustus and Severus.²⁰ A passage in Tacitus describing an increase in the number of cohorts to sixteen under Vitellius, in which the number per cohort is given as one thousand, is not conclusive in proving a change in the effective at the same time.²¹ Additional proof for a cohort of this number from the inception of the guard is provided by the archaeological remains of the *Castra Praetoria*, and there is no evidence that Tiberius changed the strength before building the camp.²² Moreover, although the praetorian cohorts associated with the late republic varied in size, we know that units of up to two thousand men were

¹⁸ For example, Durry (1938), 86 argues for a quingenary cohort, believing that Dio had attributed to the Augustan period the effective of the late second century AD. His use of the *laterculi praetorianorum* (the register of discharges) in calculating the number is criticized by Kennedy (1979), 276-287 and Passerini (1939), 62. Others who support cohorts of five hundred are Keppie (1984), 153; Grant (1974), 88; Syme (1939), 243.

¹⁹ Cf. Dio 75.2.4-5; Herodian 2.14.5.

²⁰ Among those who support milliary cohorts are Mommsen (1879), 30; Richmond (1927), 12; Passerini (1939), 62-5; Kennedy (1979), 288; Chilver (1979), 16-17; and Campbell (1984), 162, note 6.

²¹ Tacitus, *Histories* 2.93.2: *sedecim praetoriae, quattuor urbanae cohortes scribebantur, quis singula milia inessent*. If there had been a doubling of the effective at this time, a specific reference to it in the text might be expected. Contra Durry (1938), 82 who believes that Tacitus is emphasizing the exceptional nature of the Vitellian innovations, both in number of cohorts and in their effective.

²² See below, Appendix 3, "The *Castra Praetoria*", 269-275.

found.²³ An effective of one thousand men per cohort for the imperial period would also provide greater efficiency, since the praetorians were used for such a wide variety of tasks in the city, beyond the basic task of guarding the emperor and his family.

Recruiting for the guard became established under Augustus. As we have seen above, the first imperial praetorians likely were veterans from the cohorts of both Octavian and Antony.²⁴ During Augustus' reign, however, it became the practice to recruit soldiers for the guard directly on an individual basis.²⁵ In general, candidates had to be of free birth and Roman citizens before entering the service. As a result, Italians tended to dominate in the ranks until the time of Severus.²⁶ In the early period, recruits were predominantly from Latium, Etruria, Umbria, and the oldest colonies.²⁷ Under Tiberius, praetorians began to be recruited from the north of Italy, and Claudius granted the right of citizenship

²³ See above, "The Guard in the Republic", 17; 19.

²⁴ See above, "The Guard in the Republic", 21.

²⁵ Durry (1938), 240; Keppie (1984), 188.

²⁶ Brunt (1974), 193–4; Davies (1989), 23: "Most recruits would prefer to join the branch of the armed services in which their own qualifications would provide them with the best openings and rewards. This is why Italians joined the Praetorian Guard." Cf. also Birley (1961), 119–122. Le Bohec (1989), 99 notes that, at the beginning of the second century, Italians still comprised 89% of recruits for the guard, and that by the end of the Antonines, the number had fallen only slightly.

²⁷ Cf. Tacitus, *Annals* 4.5.5: *Etruria ferne Umbriaque delectae aut vetere Latio et coloni<i>s antiquitus Romanis*. Durry (1938), 241, note 1 believes that this passage "conserves an echo of a communication made by the government to reassure the senate at the time of the construction of the camp." Dio (56.23.4) records that there were Gauls and Germans serving in the guard (οἱ δὲ καὶ ἐν τῷ δορυφορικῷ στρατευόμενοι) who were sent away from Rome after the Varan disaster, but the reference is probably to the *Germani corporis custodes* and not to the praetorians.

to the Anauni (an Alpine tribe) because members already were serving in the guard.²⁸ There were also soldiers from Gallia Narbonensis, Spain, and Macedonia in the cohorts, though the inscriptions which refer to these non-Italian recruits are not securely dated.²⁹ The term of duty for the praetorians, originally sixteen years, was reduced to twelve in 14 BC, then reverted to sixteen in 5 BC.³⁰ The length of service, in addition to the higher rate of pay and the increased prospects for promotion due to their proximity to the emperor, probably attracted better recruits to the praetorians, and seems to have continued to attract Italians to the unit when they were less inclined to join the legions.³¹ While the guard had the advantage of living in the capital and environs, those who served in it still had the same restrictions as the rest of the army, in

²⁸ *Tiberius*: Tacitus, *Annals* 4.5.5. *Claudius*: CIL 5.5050 (=ILS 206); see below, "Caligula and Claudius", 86. For statistics on the recruitment of praetorians under the Julio-Claudians, cf. Durry (1938), 239-241; Passerini (1939), 146-159 (who provides a list of inscriptions of praetorians according to origin; these date from the first two centuries AD, but are not specifically dated). For recruitment in general (mostly second century evidence), see Sasei (1972), 474-480; Scheidel (1992), 281-297, especially 290.

²⁹ It has been argued that the earliest known non-Italian recruits came from Macedonia: Gaius Iulius Montanus (CIL 6.2767=ILS 2032) and Gaius Iulius Gemellus (CIL 6.2645=ILS 2030). Cf. Durry (1938), 79; 241; 252. He argued for the date to be Caligulan, based on the reference to the XII praetorian cohort, but there is no further evidence. For a recruit from Gallia Narbonensis, see CIL 6.2763. Syme (1939), 246 argues for CIL 12.1187 (=ILS 2023) to be an early inscription of a praetorian soldier from the same area. Durry (1938), 241 quotes Pliny, *NH* 25.17 for evidence of a recruit from Spain in the first century, but the origin is not clear from the context. Passerini (1939), 156-159 provides the inscriptional evidence for recruits from the provinces; in the first two centuries AD, Macedonia, Noricum, and Spain provided the most non-Italian recruits.

³⁰ *Twelve years*: Dio 54.25.6 *Sixteen years*: Dio 55.23.1. Legionaries served twenty years. Cf. Durry (1938), 262. CIL 6.2489 (=ILS 2028) belongs to a soldier from the first century AD who served in the same praetorian cohort for 18 years.

³¹ Campbell (1984), 10; 111. See also Birley (1961), 122. The social status of these recruits is unknown, though Durry (1938), 251-57 argues for the guard to be composed of men of modest birth whereas Passerini (1939), 159-69 thinks that they were from families who were better off. Cf. also Campbell (1984), 4.

particular, the inability to marry while in service. The importance of military diplomas for the praetorians may stem from this injunction, for most of these grants were given to soldiers who came from, or retired to, places outside Italy.³²

Very little is known about the guard during the principate of Augustus. This lack of information results from the absence of a contemporary and comprehensive source for the reign. Augustus does not refer specifically to the guard in the autobiographical *Res Gestae*.³³ Moreover, by the end of the first century AD, the praetorians had become an integral part of the functioning of the city and later events had overshadowed their beginning. How extensive their responsibilities were under Augustus, therefore, is uncertain.³⁴ For example, when the emperor went east in 22/1 BC, the city was subjected to periods of unrest.³⁵ Whether the guard was used to help quell such disturbances is not known. In addition, their presence with Augustus on this trip is not recorded, though it is likely that soldiers went with him.³⁶ The ways in which the

³² Cf. Maxfield (1986), 43. Campbell (1984), 111 suggests that diplomas were a "mark of honour at Rome." The earliest extant diploma for a praetorian dates to AD 71/2 (CIL 16.25), but it is thought that they were issued prior to this, perhaps beginning under Claudius; cf. Levick (1990), 137. On military diplomas in general, see Eck and Wolff (1986).

³³ Dury (1938), 10. Passerini (1939), 210, however, believes that Augustus included the praetorians among those referred to as *milites* in his autobiography.

³⁴ For responsibilities of individual soldiers in the cohorts, see Dury (1938), 93-128.

³⁵ Dio 54.6.5. There were riots over the consular elections, and stability was maintained only after the appointment of Agrippa to look after affairs in Rome.

³⁶ Millar (1977), 61 comments that soldiers accompanied the emperor on all journeys, even within Italy. Their presence is not always recorded, however, and Campbell (1984), 113 disagrees that "each emperor was accompanied everywhere by troops."

praetorians were later employed under the Julio-Claudians – fighting fires, providing security at the games, dealing with prisoners – probably originated during the reign of Augustus, but there are only hints of this in the sources. For example, Suetonius mentions that there were soldiers at the games, and that on several occasions, troops were posted throughout the city, as after the Varan disaster of AD 9, but there is no specific mention of the guard in these incidents.³⁷ The involvement of the praetorians in fire-fighting is not specifically attested for this period, but they must have taken part in battling any major blaze, especially before the organization of the *vigiles* in AD 6.³⁸ The evidence for their being involved in executions under Augustus is meager, but there was a precedent for such activity. While still a triumvir, Octavian had had the praetor Quintus Gallius removed from his presence by centurions and soldiers, tortured, and then executed because he suspected that Gallius had been armed at one of the tribunals.³⁹ The situation under this emperor, however, was substantially different from that of those who came after him: the presence of an armed force in the city, while not unknown, was still unusual, and the lack of information about the movements and responsibilities of the praetorians in this reign

³⁷ *Games*: Suetonius, *Augustus* 14; 43.3; 44.1. *Guards*: Dio 56.23.4; Suetonius, *Augustus* 23; 32.1.

³⁸ There were eight serious fires in the reign of Augustus prior to AD 6, seven of which occurred after the formation of the guard. Cf. Werner (1906), 46.

³⁹ Suetonius, *Augustus* 27.4. The previous section in Suetonius records the execution of a knight suspected of being a spy because he had been taking notes during one of Octavian's speeches to the soldiers and the citizens.

probably can be attributed to a desire by Augustus to downplay their role in the state.

It is impossible to reconstruct the method of command for the guard before 2 BC when Augustus appointed the first praetorian prefects. Prior to that time, the tribunes of the cohorts undoubtedly received their orders directly from the emperor.⁴⁰ The reluctance to delegate responsibility for the guard to any one individual in the early years of the reign may have resulted from a desire to deflect criticism for having stationed troops in the city; by 2 BC, there would have been less concern about their presence. In the beginning, the duty of the prefects was focused on the military aspects, and the power later associated with the office was not evident because the role of the guard had not yet been clearly defined.⁴¹ As the responsibilities of the praetorians expanded, it was only logical that the position of prefect would take on additional significance as well. How the first two men who were appointed to the position were chosen is uncertain, and very little is known about them other than their names.⁴² Quintus Ostorius

⁴⁰ Brunt (1983), 59-60. He questions whether the "establishment of a permanent prefecture was not the culmination of a process in which Augustus had from time to time delegated supreme command to one or more of the tribunes."

⁴¹ Howe (1966²), 10; 32: "The basic function of the office is indicated by the title *praefectus praetorio*, prefect of the *praetorium* of the emperor as military commander." Cf. also Brunt (1983), 60; Eck (1987), 278. The prefects were the only higher officials at the side of the emperor who were armed. Cf. Millar (1977), 123. Syme (1958), 591, however, notes that the "post was military in rank, but political in significance."

⁴² Dio 55.10.10: καὶ μέντοι καὶ ἐπάρχους τῶν δορυφόρων τότε πρῶτον Κύντιόν τε Ὀστώριον Σκαπούλῳ καὶ Πούπλιον Σάλουιον ἄπρον ἀπέδειξεν. On the issue of patronage in the appointment to the equestrian prefectures, see Saller (1982), 49; Millar (1977), 64; Sherwin-White (1939), 17.

Scapula's career is obscure; he seems to have been the brother of the Publius Ostorius Scapula who was prefect of Egypt under Augustus and whose descendants gained the consulship under Claudius.⁴³ It is possible that a marriage between Publius and the daughter of Sallustius Crispus (one of Augustus' ministers) brought the brothers to the attention of the emperor.⁴⁴ About the other prefect, Publius Salvius Aper, nothing is known.⁴⁵ The issue of collegiality is an important one, for Augustus clearly saw a need for the office to be shared, most likely to facilitate the supervision of the cohorts at this time, since they were not yet housed together in the city, though it has been argued that "duality meant that one prefect could remain at Rome, while another was deployed elsewhere."⁴⁶ Dio offers a practical explanation for having two prefects: should one become "indisposed" (ἐπαίσθηταί τι τῷ σώματι), the other would still be there to provide protection for the emperor.⁴⁷ It is also instructive that Augustus chose equestrians for this office. It has been suggested that because Maecenas was an *eques*, Augustus preferred to select his praetorian

⁴³ Cf. Wachtel (1989), 241-6; Hanson (1982), 243-253. Sherwin-White (1939), 16 erred in his attribution of the prefecture of Egypt to Quintus, and his claim that movement from the praetorian to the Egyptian prefecture was established with this move must be discarded.

⁴⁴ Hanson (1982), 247.

⁴⁵ Syme (1986), 301 suggests that he came from Brixia in Transpadane Italy, based on CIL 5.4201 (=ILS 4902), which records a Lucius Salvius Aper as a magistrate in 8 BC.

⁴⁶ Brunt (1983), 60; followed by Nippel (1995), 91.

⁴⁷ Dio 52.24.2.

prefects from that class.⁴⁸ But it is more likely that they were selected because the praetorians functioned as the emperor's personal guard, and to have put senators in charge of such a unit undoubtedly would create friction between them and the princeps, and perhaps be dangerous for the emperor.⁴⁹

The reason for the transfer of command from the emperor to the prefects is not recorded in our sources. Augustus clearly maintained overall control; evidence is provided by the language on the diplomas issued at a later date to the praetorians, for the prefects are not mentioned at all on these documents, and the phrase *qui in meo praetorio militaverunt* clearly illustrates who was in charge.⁵⁰ There may in fact be a practical explanation for the transfer of power: the inability of the emperor to continue to handle the day-to-day command of the cohorts himself, especially since the praetorians were involved in so many different activities in the capital.⁵¹ A command structure was necessary to coordinate these tasks, and the movement of the tribunes through the system did

⁴⁸ Durry (1938), 157.

⁴⁹ Cf. Brunt (1983), 60: "it might have been rather invidious for [Augustus] to choose any particular senators for a commission so closely linked with his own person." See also Rudich (1993), 234; Eck (1987), 279; 286; Campbell (1984), 117.

⁵⁰ Campbell (1994), 38 refers to the praetorian prefects as the "deputy commanders". The relationship between the emperor and the praetorian cohorts also is shown by the carrying of his image on their standards, and by the princeps giving the watchword to the cohort on duty at the palace. Cf. Passerini (1939), 208, and see below, "Tiberius", 38, note 4.

⁵¹ Syme (1986), 300, however, connects the creation of the post with the ruin of Augustus' daughter, Julia, and the elimination of her lovers, without further comment.

not allow for long-term commands to be established.⁵² The great influence which the prefects later had with the emperor is not attested this early, but the close association between them must have existed from the creation of the office.⁵³

We have no idea how long Scapula and Aper remained in office. The inclusion of a certain “Valerius Ligur” on lists of praetorian prefects under Augustus rests on a single passage in Dio in which it is recorded that Claudius, when granting the right of a statue and seat in the senate to his prefect Rufrius Pollio, commented that Augustus had done the same for Valerius.⁵⁴ There is no other evidence for this appointment and it is possible that he never held the post at all, but that he had been granted the honours in an entirely different capacity. No title is given to Valerius in the passage, and it is not clear from the text that this man was praetorian prefect.⁵⁵

⁵² The orders for the soldiers probably continued to originate from the palace, however, where it is likely that the prefects had their headquarters. Even after the construction of the *Castra Praetoria*, the center of operations for the guard must have continued to be the palace, for there is no evidence of a headquarters building in the camp itself. See Appendix 3, “The *Castra Praetoria*”, 272.

⁵³ Saller (1982), 62: “. . . it cannot be doubted that praetorian prefects, whose very appointments testified to the emperor’s confidence in their loyalty and friendship, were among the most influential figures in imperial circles.” See also Hanson (1982), 252: “. . . the prefect of the Guard had access to the person of the emperor. It was this proximity to power and the transfer of power which would make the prefecture of the Guard the more important post when the equestrian career solidified into a fixed order of office toward the end of the century.”

⁵⁴ Dio 60.23.2: καὶ ἵνα γε μὴ καινοτομεῖν τι δόξῃ, ἔφη καὶ τὸν Αὐγουστον ἐπὶ Οὐαλερίου τινός Λίγυος τοῦτο πεποιηκέναι.

⁵⁵ Passerini (1939), 276, following Dessau, tentatively suggests that Dio has erred in the name of the prefect, and that it should be Varius Ligur, possibly the father of Varius Ligur mentioned in Tacitus, *Annals* 4.42 and 6.30. Syme (1986), 301 adduces CIL 5.7598 (=ILS 171), a dedication by Publius Varius Ligus to Gemellus, as further evidence for the prefect to be Varius Ligur. Cf. PIR¹, V 189.

Beyond this controversial piece of information, however, we have only scant evidence about one other prefect appointed by Augustus. When the emperor died in AD 14, Lucius Seius Strabo was the praetorian prefect who swore the oath of allegiance to Tiberius.⁵⁶ According to a passage of Macrobius, Strabo was a friend of Augustus, which may help to explain his appointment.⁵⁷ Nothing is known about the prefect's early career, though we do have epigraphic evidence that he was from Volsinii.⁵⁸ But there is no indication of when he became praetorian prefect, nor whether he ever had had a colleague. It is instructive that the "rule" about sharing the prefecture had been disregarded even within Augustus' lifetime.⁵⁹ Shortly after Tiberius became emperor, however, Strabo was given a colleague: his son Lucius Aelius Sejanus, who was to be instrumental in making the guard a powerful tool of the principate.

⁵⁶ Tacitus, *Annals* 1.7.2.

⁵⁷ Macrobius, *Sat.* 2.4.18. Strabo is said to have asked Augustus for his opinion of Cato.

⁵⁸ Corbier (1983)

⁵⁹ Dio's claim about the collegiality of the office as represented in the dramatic speech presented by Maecenas to Augustus – that it is dangerous to entrust the post to one man – clearly reflects the benefit of hindsight, since there was no precedent for such a fear at the time of the establishment of the prefects. Cf. 52.24.1-6. In Dio's own lifetime, the example of the praetorian prefect Plautianus (whom Dio disliked; see, for example, 76.15) perhaps provided the rationale for such a claim.

IV. Tiberius

Tiberius came to power in AD 14, on the death of Augustus. This was the first transition of power in Rome since the fall of the republic, and care had been taken to ensure that the new princeps would have the support of the guard. Tacitus records that Livia had posted soldiers around the house in which Augustus died in order to stall the announcement of the death until Tiberius had arrived to take control.¹ Shortly thereafter, the oath of loyalty to the new emperor was taken by the consuls, followed by Strabo, the prefect of the praetorian guard, and Gaius Turranius, the *praefectus annonae*; after them came the senate, the army and the people.² The order in which this occurred – the senate after the two prefects – indicates the significance that by now was attached to the office of praetorian prefect as head of the emperor's personal guard.³ After the death of Augustus, Tiberius also had given the watchword to the praetorian cohorts, an act indicating that he was now their commander-in-

¹ Tacitus, *Annals* 1.5.3–4

² Tacitus, *Annals* 1.7.2; cf. Dio 57.3. The *praefectus annonae* was among the first to swear allegiance because of the importance of the grain supply to the city. It is the absence of the urban prefect that is interesting, for one would expect him to have been among this group, given his command of the urban cohorts. Grant (1974), 115 suggests that there was an interval between two successive tenures by Piso, who had been appointed in AD 13, or that the post was vacant. See also Jones (1960), 17; 179, note 57.

³ Martin & Woodman (1989), 87. Campbell (1984), 81 notes that there is no evidence that, on this occasion, the emperor formally addressed the guard, as would later become the practice upon accession.

chief.⁴ Even though the institution had been in place for less than fifty years, the guard had become important enough to demand careful attention from the incoming emperor. There is no clearer indication of their importance than the size of the legacy left to the praetorians in the will of Augustus.⁵

The guard also took part in the funeral of Augustus, which is the best documented imperial funeral for the Julio-Claudian period.⁶ Their participation helped to reinforce in the eyes of the public the special relationship between the praetorians and the emperor. In the republican period, soldiers had been present at the funerals of men such as Sulla and Caesar as a mark of honour to the deceased, though we do not know the unit to which they had belonged.⁷ It is not surprising, therefore, that the guard would be present at the funeral of the first princeps as the military component, but the fact that these were the soldiers who had constituted Augustus' personal army and who now belonged to Tiberius could not have escaped those who were in attendance.⁸

⁴ Tacitus, *Annals* 1.7.5. It was traditionally the emperor who provided the daily watchword to the contingent of the guard which was on duty on the Palatine. Cf. Dury, (1938), 166; Passerini (1939), 209. For further examples, see Suetonius, *Claudius* 42.1; Dio 60.16.7.

⁵ Suetonius, *Augustus* 101.2; Dio 56.32.3. Watson (1969), 109 notes that Augustus left the praetorians one thousand sesterces each "with a view to ensuring an easy succession." The urban cohorts received half that amount, and the soldiers in the legions three hundred. Tiberius doubled the amounts; cf. Suetonius, *Tiberius* 48.2; Dio 56.32.3.

⁶ Dio (54.28.5) says that the funeral of Augustus was conducted in the same manner as Agrippa's had been earlier (12 BC). Cf. also Velleius Paterculus, *Histories* 2.124.2. For a detailed description of the proceedings, see Toynbee (1971), 58-9.

⁷ For Sulla's funeral, see Appian, *BCiv* 1.105-6; he remarks on the fear which the soldiers caused. Cf. also Plutarch, *Sulla* 38; Toynbee (1971), 55. For Caesar's funeral, see Suetonius, *Julius* 84; Dio 44.33-51; Toynbee (1971), 57-8.

⁸ For the funeral, see Dio 56.31-42; Tacitus, *Annals* 1.8.6; Suetonius, *Augustus* 99.2-100.4.

It was under Tiberius that the praetorian prefecture emerged as the dominant administrative and advisory position in the state. Sejanus was appointed shortly after Tiberius came to power to be Strabo's colleague.⁹ The reason for this appointment is uncertain.¹⁰ By AD 16, Sejanus was sole prefect.¹¹ He would be the architect of one of the major changes to the guard in this period, the concentration of the cohorts into a single camp, and would bring the prefecture to a prominence in the administration of the state probably not envisioned when Augustus created the position.

We have few details of Sejanus' activities in the years prior to AD 23, and even less information about the guard itself. The responsibilities of the praetorians in these years must have remained much as they had been under Augustus, that is, policing the games, assisting in fighting fires, protection (and often surveillance) of the imperial family, and the confinement of criminals. One incident that is recorded concerns the narrow escape of the senator Quintus

⁹ Tacitus, *Annals* 1.7.2: *Seius Strabo . . . ille praetoriarum cohortium praefectus . . .* Meissner (1968), 4 errs in believing that Sejanus was appointed by Augustus

¹⁰ The appointment has been linked with the mutiny in Pannonia following the death of Augustus; cf. Levick (1976), 73. For the mutiny, see Tacitus, *Annals* 1.17; 24-30. But, see below, "The Guard as a Specialized Military Unit", 128. Sejanus had been involved in military matters prior to this assignment. Tacitus places him in the group that accompanied Gaius Caesar to the east in 1 BC; see *Annals* 4.1.2; cf. also 4.39.2. Velleius Paterculus also accompanied Gaius east, but does not mention Sejanus in the description of events. Cf. *Histories* 2.101-103; Woodman (1977), 248, note 1.

¹¹ Strabo apparently had been appointed prefect of Egypt; see Stein (1950), 24-5. The exact date of his tenure is uncertain, but Stein believes Strabo died in office. Cf. Pliny, *NH* 36.197. The appointment itself is only tentatively accepted by Levick (1976), 273, note 60, and is challenged by Hennig (1975), 7-8, who agrees that Strabo was sent to Egypt, but on a special assignment and not in an "official capacity." Cf. also Schwartz (1982), 192.

Haterius.¹² After irritating Tiberius at a senate meeting in AD 14, he went to the palace to apologize and “accidentally” tripped the emperor. Tacitus reports that the guards nearly killed Haterius, and it was only the intervention of Livia that saved him. The quickness with which the soldiers reacted seems to indicate a heightened sense of anxiety around the emperor in the early stages of his rule. The willingness of the praetorians to kill a senator without orders from anyone attests as well their zeal in protecting Tiberius at any cost.

The lack of information about Sejanus in the early part of Tiberius’ reign should not be interpreted as an indication that he was unimportant in these years.¹³ Just how powerful he was prior to AD 23 probably will never be known.¹⁴ He obviously had carried out his duties well, both in an administrative and military capacity, as is shown by the fact that he received the *ornamenta praetoria* in 19 or 20, the first equestrian to do so.¹⁵ The role of praetorian prefect was yet to be clearly defined, and it would not be surprising therefore to find Tiberius allocating responsibilities to Sejanus much in the same way that

¹² Tacitus, *Annals* 1.13.6.

¹³ Tacitus mentions the prefect only occasionally in the first three books of the *Annals*: 3.16.1: the trial of Piso (though even the author is unconvinced of Sejanus’ involvement); 29.4: the betrothal of Sejanus’ daughter to Claudius’ son; 35.1: the appointment of his uncle Junius Blaesus as proconsul of Africa; 66.3: the prosecution of Gaius Junius Silanus. For purposes of style, Tacitus delayed Sejanus’ characterization until Book 4. Cf. Syme (1958), 308. The prefect’s first appearance in Dio (57.19.4) is in the year AD 20.

¹⁴ Tacitus (*Annals* 4.7.1) does imply, however, that it was because of Sejanus’ influence that the early part of Tiberius’ reign was so enlightened.

¹⁵ Dio 57.19.7.

Augustus had done with such men as Maecenas and Agrippa.¹⁶ To those in Rome, however, it was probably not just the reliance of the emperor on the prefect that was alarming, it was also the fact that Sejanus was commander of the guard that made his prominence more threatening. Unfortunately, the silence of the sources means that our knowledge of the relationship between prefect and emperor at this time must remain virtually unknown.¹⁷

The prefect certainly had gained the confidence of the emperor by AD 23, when he convinced Tiberius to allow the concentration of the praetorian guard into a single camp just to the northeast of Rome.¹⁸ The stationing of all of the cohorts in a permanent base in the city was one of the most significant events in Tiberius' reign and in the history of the guard itself. The exact date of the establishment of the camp is uncertain, either AD 20 or 23.¹⁹ It is possible that construction was begun in 20, but that the final relocation of the praetorians was not accomplished until 23. The placement of these soldiers on the outskirts of the

¹⁶ Velleius Paterculus, *Histories* 2.127.1 (comparing the relationships of Sejanus and Tiberius with that of Agrippa and Augustus): *raro eminentes viri non magnis adiutoribus ad gubernandam fortunam suam usi sunt*. Cf. also Syme (1958), 402; Hennig, (1975), 25; Shotter (1992), 42.

¹⁷ The ancient sources depict Tiberius as a reluctant princeps (for example, Tacitus, *Annals* 1.11), which would account for the propensity of the emperor to rely on men like Sejanus. As Woodman (1977), 245 points out, if Tiberius' hesitation is accepted, "[it] goes a long way towards explaining the otherwise astonishingly rapid career of the distinguished *eques* L. Aelius Sejanus."

¹⁸ Tacitus, *Annals* 4.2.1; Suetonius, *Tiberius* 37.1. It should be noted that Suetonius does not mention Sejanus in connection with the construction of the camp. Cf. also Dio 57.19.6.

¹⁹ AD 20: Syme (1958), 424. According to Syme, Tacitus has withheld the event until the year 23 in order to include it in his general assessment of Sejanus at the beginning of Book 4. AD 23: Durry (1938), 45.

capital set a precedent: it was the first time that a permanent military institution was established virtually right in the city, and no longer could the means by which the emperor exerted his power be ignored.

Tacitus records that Sejanus brought all of the cohorts together into one camp

*ut simul imperia acciperent numeroque et robore et visu inter se fiducia ipsis, in ceteros metus oreretur. praetendebat lascivire militem diductum; si quid subitum ingruat, maiore auxilio pariter subveniri; et severius acturos, si vallum statuatur procui urbis inlecebris.*²⁰

Ultterior motives have been suggested for this action, thought to be hinted at by Tacitus' use of *praetendebat* to indicate the guile of the prefect. It is assumed that he wanted to have better control over the city (including the senate) and the emperor.²¹ It could be, however, that there was indeed a problem with discipline since the soldiers were still being billeted throughout the area, and maintaining control may have been increasingly difficult if the number of cohorts in Rome had gradually increased over previous years as they were brought into the city from the environs.²² With the principate more firmly established, the precautions taken by Augustus to avoid the appearance of imposing an armed guard on the city no longer were necessary, and it certainly would be safer for

²⁰ Tacitus, *Annals* 4.2.1; cf. also Dio 57.19.6.

²¹ Durry (1938), 152; Passerini (1939), 52; Marañón (1956), 129; Meissner (1968), 5.

²² Juvenal's Satire 16 certainly suggests a tumultuous relationship between soldiers and civilians; cf. Campbell (1984), 251; Speidel (1994), 95-96: "Maintaining discipline in the city was of the greatest importance . . . to keep the men out of mischief always was a hard task for Roman officers . . . soldiers were all too ready to stray from their camps and become a scourge to civilians, in the city of Rome perhaps even more so than elsewhere . . ."

the citizens to have the cohorts housed together where their activities could be monitored.

The concentration of the guard in the camp can be viewed, therefore, as a practical decision. In Rome prior to AD 23, the praetorian cohorts had been engaged in a wide variety of tasks. We have already noted their role in helping to fight fires and to patrol the theatres.²³ Under Tiberius, the praetorians were used as well to control protesters complaining about the high price of grain, and they were also sent to put down a disturbance in Pollentia in northern Italy.²⁴ The concentration of the guard in one place in Rome was probably intended to allow it to be put to greater use in assignments of this sort, since having the soldiers all together, close to the capital, would allow them to function much more efficiently than when they were dispersed.

It was probably also at the time of the move to the *Castra Praetoria* that the number of cohorts was increased from nine to twelve. The additional responsibilities that had been assigned to the guard provides the rationale for such an expansion. Having an additional three cohorts would enable the guard to be used more efficiently throughout the city and would allow the emperor's personal guard to be integrated even more thoroughly into the administration of

²³ *Augustus*: Suetonius, *Augustus* 44.1. *Tiberius*: Tacitus, *Annals* 1.77.1; cf. also 1.54.2; Suetonius, *Tiberius* 37.2. See below, "The Guard in Civil Administration", 177-211.

²⁴ *Grain riots*: Tacitus, *Annals* 6.13.1. *Pollentia*: Suetonius, *Tiberius* 37.3; see below, "The Guard as a Specialized Military Unit", 129-130.

the city. There is no literary evidence for this change. Tacitus lists nine cohorts in AD 23 in his discussion on the strength of the Roman armed forces, while Dio mentions ten cohorts in his catalogue of troops under Augustus.²⁵ Until recently, the epigraphic evidence had provided little information, except to show that, prior to Vespasian, the praetorian cohorts included those numbered XI and XII.²⁶ The assumption was that any increase would have been recorded by Tacitus. Therefore, the creation of the new cohorts was attributed to the reign of either Caligula or Claudius, and was thought to have been noted in the section of the *Annals* which is lost.²⁷ Inscriptional evidence was adduced in support of this idea.²⁸ But no consensus was reached on the emperor responsible for the increase.

An inscription discovered in 1976 seems to provide documentation that the creation of two additional cohorts occurred under Tiberius. Found in Lecce dei Marsi, it is dedicated to Aulus Virgius Marsus, who served as a tribune of the IIIIth and XIth praetorian cohorts:

A. Virgio L. f. Marso, | prim. pil. leg. III Gallicae |
iterum, praef. castr. Aegy., | praef. fabr., tr. mil. in

²⁵ Tacitus, *Annals* 4.5.3; Dio 55.24.6.

²⁶ Dury (1938), 78 lists five inscriptions which mention the XI cohort and six which mention the XII cohort. However, all of these are dated only broadly to the first century based on the style of their lettering.

²⁷ Dury (1938), 79. The original idea was Mommsen's.

²⁸ CIL 5.7003 (=ILS 2701), Gaius Gavius Silvanus (dating to the reign of Nero), and CIL 6. 2767 (=ILS 2032), Gaius Julius Montanus (thought by Dury [1938], 79 to date to the reign of Caligula), both soldiers of the XII praetorian cohort. For Silvanus, see below, "Nero", 108; "The Guard in Civil Administration", 192.

praet. | divi Aug. et Ti. Caesaris Aug. | cohort. XI et
 IIII praetoriar., | IIII vir. quinq. delato hon | ore ab
 dec. et popul. in col. Troad. | Aug. et Marru[v]io,
 testamento | dedit vicalibus Anninis imagin. |
 Caesarum argentias quinque | et sestertia X milia |
 vicales Anninis honor. | causa.²⁹

Marsus became a tribune of the guard under Augustus after holding a primipilate in a legion, an advancement which was not unusual in the career of a praetorian officer.³⁰ He then became *primuspilus* for a second time.³¹ After this distinction, he moved through two senior posts, *praefectus castrorum Aegypti* and *praefectus fabrum*, and finally returned to Rome to serve as praetorian tribune for a second time sometime after AD 23.³² His term of service in the capital was with the XIth and IIIIth praetorian cohorts. The inclusion of the XIth in connection with either Augustus or Tiberius indicates that the increase in the number of cohorts had to have occurred before the reign of Caligula. The use of the phrase *divi Aug(usti)* means that one of the appointments had to be before AD 14.

Since Tacitus makes reference to only nine cohorts in AD 23, Letta argued that the command of the IIIIth cohort had occurred under Augustus.³³ He

²⁹ AE (1978), #286. The inscription receives extensive discussion in Letta (1978), 3-19 and in Dobson (1982), 242-257. Cf. also Demougin (1992), #318.

³⁰ Dobson (1979), 199. Demougin (1992), 268 argues that he would have served first in the ranks of the praetorians.

³¹ Campbell (1994), #96 notes that "this is the earliest clear example of the position of chief centurion twice."

³² This summary of Marsus' career is based upon Dobson (1982), 248.

³³ Letta (1978), 11. See also Dobson (1982), 327.

believed that the reversal of the praetorian tribunes from their chronological order resulted from a slight imprecision in the setting up of the inscription; there are other examples of similar inversions of chronology.³⁴ It should be noted, however, that another interpretation has been proposed, namely that cohorts X and XI came into existence at the very end of the reign of Augustus and that they were disbanded by Tiberius prior to AD 23 so as to number nine in that year. This explanation, though maintaining the order of the tribunes in the inscription, seems very unlikely since it would mean the discharge of two entire cohorts after only a few years' service.³⁵

Letta also argues that the second tribunate, that of the XIth cohort, would have occurred quite soon after AD 23 since it is unlikely that the two appointments would have been separated by an excessive amount of time. Allowing for each tribunate to be only one year in duration, he concludes that the gap between them had to have been at least nine years (AD 14-23), during which time Marsus could have held his second primipilate, and been at Alexandria Troias.³⁶ But it is not certain that a praetorian tribunate was held for

³⁴ Dobson (1982), 328 cites CIL 9. 5839 (= ILS 2084) in which Gaius Oppius Bassus is recorded to have served in the XIIIth and XIIIth urban cohorts, and 9. 5840 (= ILS 2085), also belonging to Bassus, in which the appointments are reversed.

³⁵ AE (1978), 286. Another interpretation is offered by Demougin (1992), 270: Marsus' first tribunate was in the XIth urban cohort. This solution maintains the order of tribunes given in the inscription, but the absence of the adjective *urbanae* is troubling, and the explanations offered for the omission (either the designation XI would clearly indicate an urban cohort, or the stonecutter had made an error) are not convincing.

³⁶ Letta (1978), 11.

only one year, and it is possible that the two assignments were for longer durations.³⁷ The first assignment, then, to the IIIIth cohort, could have begun under Augustus, and extended to Tiberius' reign, with the second post, in the XIth cohort, occurring entirely under the latter emperor. Since it seems to have been extremely rare at this period to hold more than one tribunate in the guard, there must have been extenuating circumstances for Marsus' return, and the logical solution seems to be that there was a need for experienced officers in the newly formed praetorian cohorts in the early 20s AD.³⁸

It no longer seems likely that the increase in the number of cohorts of the guard could be attributed to the reigns of Caligula or Claudius. For whatever reason, Tacitus did not include the information on this change in his section on the camp.³⁹ In fact, the argument from silence is unconvincing, since Tacitus often leaves out information that we would consider important to the narrative. Based on the evidence of the Lecce dei Marsi inscription, it may be argued that the increase in the number of cohorts of the praetorian guard that occurred under Tiberius was part of the reorganization brought about by Sejanus, and was connected with the construction of the camp. Additional evidence for assigning

³⁷ Dobson (1982), 327.

³⁸ Ibid, 328. Dobson suggests that the two tribunates were placed together on the inscription because Marsus wanted to "emphasize the distinction . . . of serving two emperors in the responsible task", and the "placing of a post . . . out of chronological order in a career to emphasize some special point about it is a common practice."

³⁹ Campbell (1994), 54 suggests that the increase in cohorts occurred after 23, but during the reign of Tiberius.

the increase to this time is offered by the archaeological remains of the *Castra Praetoria* itself.⁴⁰ The design of the barrack blocks, some of which were two-storeyed, provided considerable space for housing troops as did the rooms along the inside of the walls; the use of *opus reticulatum* dates these structures to the original construction of the camp. The areas of housing connected with the walls are unlike those of any other Roman camp of the time, and this type of construction was not done again until much later in the empire.⁴¹

Tacitus portrays Sejanus as using the easy access to the praetorians in the camp in order to gain the favour of the soldiers.⁴² Command of the guard, in name at least, rested with the emperor. But, in a practical sense, the prefects were the ones who had responsibility for the day-to-day activities of these cohorts, and by this time, the duties must have required increasingly complex scheduling. It was reasonable, therefore, that Sejanus should communicate with his men, and his actions need not be seen as remarkable, and in fact, were simply part of his responsibility for the administration of the guard. Tacitus notes moreover that the emperor referred to the prefect as a “partner in his labours”, not only in

⁴⁰ See Appendix 3, “The *Castra Praetoria*”, 269-275.

⁴¹ Cf. Lander (1984), 259-61.

⁴² Tacitus, *Annals* 4.2.2. Tacitus also adds that Sejanus chose the centurions and tribunes himself. With respect to the post of centurion, however, this action was not unusual in the Roman army; cf. Campbell (1984), 105. Appointment to the legionary tribunes, however, generally seems to have been made by the emperor, though many men were probably brought to the emperor’s attention as a personal favour, and in the case of the guard, this might involve the prefect. See Saller (1982), 42; 158. Cf. also Millar (1977), 276; 285.

private conversations, but even in the senate and with the people.⁴³ The other sources also indicate that Tiberius was relying on Sejanus to an ever greater extent.⁴⁴ The responsibilities for the prefect would have been significant because of the number of soldiers in Rome, and the variety of tasks that the praetorians were being used for beyond the basic protection of the imperial family. In fact, Sejanus is described as having looked after both civil and military administration in the capital.⁴⁵ But such influence was bound to create antagonism, and Tacitus records that Sejanus was blamed for every crime because of his close relationship with Tiberius and the general hostility toward the prefect by the public.⁴⁶

Sometime in AD 25, Tiberius held an exhibition of the guard. The praetorians were drilled before the senators in an attempt to overawe them with a military display.⁴⁷ It also reinforced for the soldiers that they had a special

⁴³ Tacitus, *Annals* 4.2.2: *socium laborum non modo in sermonibus, sed apud patres et populum celebraret.*

⁴⁴ Dio (57.19.7) uses the terms σύμβουλος και ὑπηρέτης of the prefect in reference to his relationship with the emperor; cf. also 58.4.3 (κοινωνὸν τῶν φροντῖδων). Velleius Paterculus (*Histories* 2.127.3), with whom the idea may originate, calls him the *principalium onerum adiutor in omnia*. Woodman (1977), 246–47 points out that, “such nomenclature must have had an incalculable effect upon the senatorial order at Rome.”

⁴⁵ Tacitus, *Annals* 6.8.2: *mox urbis et militiae munia simul obeuntem [Seianum].*

⁴⁶ Ibid, 4.11.2: *sed quia Seianus facinorum omnium repertor habebatur, ex nimia caritate in eum Caesaris et ceterorum in utrumque odio.* This animosity went so far as to include allegations that the prefect had murdered Drusus, Tiberius’ son. The source of the story was Apicata, the former wife of Sejanus. The rumour did not even surface until 31, eight years after Drusus’ death, and after the accused himself had been executed. Cf. Dio 58.11.6. Although it is extremely unlikely that Sejanus would have confided plans of murder to a former spouse and that such information could have been kept secret for so long, and despite a lack of a motive, ancient authors accepted the veracity of the accusation. See Tacitus, *Annals* 4.3.2–5, 8–10; Seneca, *Octavia* 942–44; Suetonius, *Tiberius* 62.1; Dio 57.22.1–4. Evidence for a natural death for Drusus may be found in Josephus, *AJ* 18.146, 206. For a survey of modern scholarship, cf. Meise (1969), 51, note 9.

⁴⁷ Dio 57.24.5: ἐν δ’ οὖν τῷ τότε ὁ Τιβέριος τὴν τοῦ δορυφορικοῦ γυμνασίαν τοῖς βουλευταῖς, ὥσπερ ἀγνοοῦσι τὴν δύναμιν αὐτῶν, ἐπέδειξεν, ὅπως καὶ πολλοὺς σφας καὶ ἐρρωμένους ἰδόντες μᾶλλον

relationship with the emperor, and allowed them to take pride in this connection in a public display. At the same time, they no doubt realized that their privileged position depended upon their continued attention to the well-being of Tiberius, and not that of the senate.

Such displays seem to have been done at times when there was some sort of threat to the emperor perceived; in this case, the warning was aimed primarily at the elder Agrippina.⁴⁸ Sejanus had become alarmed over her growing popularity, and had informed the emperor that there was a danger of civil war unless something was done.⁴⁹ There was concern that some of the guard might be convinced to side with Agrippina in any conflict, out of respect for her late husband, Germanicus.⁵⁰ Now that the praetorians were concentrated in Rome, such apprehensions had taken on additional importance since it was easier for the soldiers to act as a cohesive unit. Whether any of them would have abandoned the emperor for Agrippina in this instance is doubtful, but the warning of civil strife, while probably exaggerated, may indicate that there was

αὐτὸν φοβῶνται. He says that the purpose was to make the senators more afraid of Tiberius. Tacitus does not mention the incident.

⁴⁸ Tacitus, *Annals* 4.17.1; cf. Suetonius, *Tiberius* 54.1. See Bird (1969), 71. In the previous year, the priests in Rome, led by the example of the *pontifices*, had included the names of Agrippina's sons, Nero and Drusus, in the prayers offered at the beginning of the year for the safety of the emperor. Tiberius was angered and attributed the action to their mother's intercession.

⁴⁹ Tacitus, *Annals* 4.17.3.

⁵⁰ When Agrippina had returned from the east in AD 19 with Germanicus' ashes, two cohorts of the guard had gone to meet her at Brundisium and carried the urn to Rome, perhaps not a surprising gesture toward a man with whom several of the soldiers may have served in Germany in AD 16. Cf. Tacitus, *Annals* 3.2.1.

apprehension on the part of the prefect that the guard would become involved in any dispute. It was Sejanus' duty to watch out for Tiberius' interests, which is exactly what he did in this case.⁵¹

In AD 26, Tiberius withdrew to Capri. The reasons for his retreat from Rome were varied, according to the sources.⁵² Tacitus records that Sejanus encouraged Tiberius' withdrawal, though the alleged motive – to have greater power and to control access to the emperor – illustrates the bias of the author.⁵³ Tiberius took few companions to Capri, but he clearly had a contingent of praetorians with him.⁵⁴ They were used for crowd control when the emperor was dedicating temples in Campania on his way to the island.⁵⁵ Further

⁵¹ Perhaps in response to the perceived danger, there was a marked increase in treason trials following this incident. Several people who were deemed a threat to the regime were charged with a variety of crimes. Of these, many were supporters of Agrippina, including Gaius Silius and his wife (Tacitus, *Annals* 4.18-19); Vibius Serenus (ibid, 4.28-30); Claudia Pulchra (ibid, 4.52.1); Titius Sabinus (ibid, 4.68-70). Cf. Hennig (1975), 65-6; Bauman (1974), 116-124. No doubt members of the guard, under orders from the prefect, would have been involved in the apprehension and confinement of some of those who were charged, though no mention is made of this in the sources.

⁵² Tiberius was sixty-seven years old and not in very good health. He was not a popular ruler and had become impatient with the spate of rumours, and with the insults of the citizens. See, for example, Tacitus, *Annals* 4.42 (Tiberius' violent reaction to the trial of Votienus Montanus). His quarrels with both his mother and Agrippina were wearying; cf. ibid, 4.52-54; Suetonius, *Tiberius* 53.1-2. Suetonius (*Tiberius* 51.1) and Dio (57.12.6), however, cite Livia as the reason for Tiberius' departure from Rome.

⁵³ Tacitus, *Annals* 4.41.1-2; cf. also 57.1-3. The idea that it was only at the urging of the prefect that Tiberius left Rome seems too simple. Martin and Woodman (1989), 223 point to the use of *diu meditato* (in 57.1) as indicative that this decision had been contemplated for some time. Cf. also Seager (1972), 202; Syme (1986), 169.

⁵⁴ Cf. Tacitus, *Annals* 4.58.1; 67.1.

⁵⁵ The incident at Sperlonga also dates to this period; while Tiberius was dining in a cave there, a rock fall occurred. Tacitus reports that several of the servants were crushed, but that the emperor was saved by Sejanus, who shielded him with his own body. Cf. Tacitus, *Annals* 4.59.1-2. See also Suetonius, *Tiberius* 39, where there is no mention of the role of Sejanus in this incident. What role

evidence for their presence on Capri comes from a passage in Suetonius in which members of the unit are recorded to have been punished for actions while there.⁵⁶ It is impossible to tell how many soldiers were with him, or how much time they spent there before being replaced by others from Rome. While on Capri, the guard would have been involved in a wide variety of responsibilities; for example, Tacitus records that Sejanus used them to convey imperial correspondence.⁵⁷ Praetorians also probably reported to the prefect about events which occurred there.⁵⁸ This activity was crucial, since Sejanus himself may not have spent much time on Capri.⁵⁹ As sole prefect, he would need to be in Rome to oversee matters there that concerned the guard, and in particular, to coordinate the duties of the soldiers in the city. He also probably acted as the

the praetorians with Tiberius played in the sequence of events is impossible to determine, though they undoubtedly were present.

⁵⁶ Suetonius, *Tiberius* 60: *militem praetorianum ob subreptum e viridiario pavonem capite puniti. in quodam itinere lectica, qua vehebatur, vepribus impedita exploratorem viae, primarium cohortium centurionem, stratum humi paene ad necem verberavit.* The *primae cohortes* are assumed to be the praetorian guard. These incidents are somewhat puzzling. It is odd that Tiberius would have treated the soldiers so harshly given their position in protecting his person. The punishments may be the result of some other event obscured by Suetonius or his source, but the possibility must be admitted that these stories are simply exaggeration by the author intended to denigrate Tiberius since neither incident is found in the other sources.

⁵⁷ Tacitus, *Annals* 4.41.2. The use of the guard in this way meant that Sejanus had access to all communication. But this was not so unusual, since the *speculatores* had been used for such activities from the beginning; see below, "The Guard as a Specialized Military Unit", 138.

⁵⁸ Cf. Dio 58.4.2, who says that Sejanus had informers on Capri. While these are described simply as those who were around Tiberius – τοὺς τε περὶ Τιβέριον ὄντας οὕτω πάντας προσηταιρίστο – it is hard not to see them as guard members.

⁵⁹ Our sources record three occasions when Sejanus was definitely on Capri: in 28, he crossed with Tiberius to Campania at the request of the senate (Tacitus, *Annals* 4.74.2-3); in 29, embassies were sent to him by those in Rome (Dio 58.2.8); in 30, he was sent ahead from Capri by Tiberius to take up his consulship (Dio 58.4.9).

liaison between the emperor and those in Rome, and so his presence in the capital was of vital importance to Tiberius. Clearly, then, the prefect took on a greater role in the administration of the empire with Tiberius away, though it is unclear exactly how much power he had. There is little evidence, however, that Sejanus had the sort of control which once was attributed to him.⁶⁰ It is more likely that he managed what had to be done in Rome, as did others of the emperor's inner circle and in particular, the urban prefect.⁶¹

During the late 20s AD, then, Tiberius came to rely on Sejanus in Rome. Honours were heaped upon him in recognition of his perceived status.⁶² Yet, it was the close relationship between the emperor and his prefect rather than the notion of independent power on the part of the latter by which Sejanus had gained such a reputation.⁶³ Officially he was still only the prefect and Tiberius' representative in the capital. It is true that his control of the guard meant that

⁶⁰ See, for example, Marsh (1926), 233-250.

⁶¹ Seneca (*Ep.* 83.14) comments that, when he withdrew to Campania, Tiberius entrusted Piso, the urban prefect, with some sort of secret orders. Cf. Passerini (1939), 273; Syme (1986), 343.

⁶² Sejanus was honoured with the celebration of his birthday as a holiday and the taking of oaths by his Fortune as well as by that of Tiberius. For a complete discussion of the significance of the oath, see Hennig (1975), 124-131. Other distinctions included the erection of statues of the prefect, embassies from the senate, the knights and the people to Sejanus as well as to Tiberius, and the inclusion of Sejanus' name in wills. Cf. Dio 58.2.7-8; 4.4; 16.2; Suetonius, *Tiberius* 65.1. The senate also voted altars to Clementia and Amicitia with statues of both Tiberius and Sejanus alongside them. See Tacitus, *Annals* 4.74.2; cf. Platner-Ashby (1965), 21.

⁶³ One of the more striking distinctions paid to him was the inclusion of his statue among the standards of the legions of the army, with the exception of those in Syria; cf. Suetonius, *Tiberius* 48.2; Tacitus, *Annals* 4.2.3. The significance here is the extent to which the prefect has become included in honours generally reserved for members of the imperial family. Because not every legion followed this practice in honouring Sejanus, it can be assumed that there was no official directive from either the senate or the emperor.

Sejanus had considerable military authority, and the increased use of the praetorians in the civil administration of the city would have emphasized the potential danger that they represented because of their numbers. We have no evidence, however, that Sejanus ever tried to intimidate the emperor with this force, though Dio does mention that Tiberius realized the latent threat from the praetorians.⁶⁴ The perception that Sejanus could use these soldiers for his own purposes appears to have caused concern among those who were close to the emperor, and allowed such fears to be exploited by others. Yet, throughout their history, the praetorians proved to be pragmatic: the soldiers recognized who ultimately was responsible for their well-being and, as a unit, were reluctant to jeopardize that relationship. There is little reason to believe that they would have acted otherwise with Sejanus.

At the beginning of AD 31, Sejanus had the honour of holding the consulship with the emperor for five months.⁶⁵ When Tiberius stepped down in May, however, the prefect was forced to do the same.⁶⁶ There is no doubt that

⁶⁴ Dio 58.4.2.

⁶⁵ Ibid, 58.4.2-4. Cf also Suetonius, *Tiberius* 65.1. This was remarkable, for Sejanus not only was an equestrian, he also had not held any other political office. Associated with his appointment is an inscription (CIL 6. 10213 [= ILS 6044]) which mentions his confirmation by a public assembly in a meeting held on the Aventine. Whether this procedure was unusual is not certain, though the absence of any mention of this particular meeting in the sources would seem to suggest that it was not. See Seager (1972), 127. Cf. Hennig (1975), 140-142; Demougin (1988), 433-35; Levick (1967), 217-18; (1976), 119-120; Syme (1956), 259-260; Pani (1979), 154-55; Pékary (1966/67), 117.

⁶⁶ It is unclear what status the prefect had during the period of his consulship; both Durry (1938), 364 and Passerini (1939), 277-78 believe he held the offices concurrently. It has been suggested, however, that an interim prefect or a colleague must have been appointed; see de Visscher (1960), 248; Maranón (1956), 137; Hennig (1975), 144-55. After stepping down from the consulship, Sejanus was invested with proconsular *imperium*, most likely a symbolic honour, since he must

the emperor's attitude toward his prefect was changing. In October of the same year, Tiberius decided to oust Sejanus from his post as prefect. The reasons for his removal are shrouded in mystery, though according to Dio at least, Tiberius was afraid that his prefect might be proclaimed emperor in his place.⁶⁷ But there is no other evidence to confirm this fear, and the real reasons behind the action remain a subject for speculation. It is possible that some in Rome felt that with the commander of the guard having so much administrative control in the city, a dangerous situation was created, especially with the emperor away from, and the troops housed in, the capital. Whether Sejanus would ever have used the praetorians against the emperor was not important; it was the perception that he could have, both by Tiberius and others, that made his removal necessary.

Once Tiberius had decided to act, he resolved to move cautiously because of the authority that Sejanus had over the praetorians, having been their commander for fifteen years.⁶⁸ Though there is no indication that the soldiers would have abandoned the emperor for their prefect, Tiberius probably felt that it was not worth risking any confrontation with the guard. He therefore decided

have maintained his equestrian status in order to remain in command of the guard. See Dio 58.7.4. Cf. Bringmann (1977), 236-7.

⁶⁷ Dio 58.4.1: μαθὼν οὖν ταῦτα ὁ Τιβέριος οὔτε ἐν ἐλαφρῷ τὸ πρᾶγμα ἐποίησατο. φοβηθεὶς μὴ καὶ αὐτοκράτορα ἀντικρὺς αὐτὸν ἀποδείξωσιν, οὔτε ἡμέλησεν. ἐκ μὲν δὴ οὖν τοῦ προφανοῦς οὐδὲν ἔδρασε· τὸ τε γὰρ δορυφορικὸν πᾶν ἰσχυρῶς ὑκείωτο. . . Dio provides the most complete account of the fall of the prefect, since the text of Tacitus is missing for the year AD 31.

⁶⁸ Bird (1969), 81: "The emperor did not know exactly what support Sejanus might count upon from the *nobiles* in 31, but he did not underestimate the potential threat from the praetorians."

to use deception, and secretly appointed Quintus Naevius Cordus Sutorius Macro as praetorian prefect, sending him to Rome on the night of October 17, AD 31 with a letter for the senate in which Tiberius condemned his former prefect.⁶⁹

How Macro was chosen for this task is not recorded in the sources.⁷⁰ An inscription from Alba Fucens shows that, before becoming praetorian prefect, Macro had been *praefectus vigilum*, though how long he had held the position and when is unknown.⁷¹ It may have been that his position as prefect of the *vigiles* had allowed him to act on behalf of the emperor in judging the attitude in Rome towards Sejanus, and to report back to Tiberius so that the plan might be executed at the most propitious time. But his presence on Capri is difficult to explain if Macro remained in command of the *vigiles* until the implementation of the plan.⁷² It is possible that he became involved with the guard when Sejanus

⁶⁹ Dio 58.9.2-3.

⁷⁰ It is possible that he had come to the attention of the emperor through his marriage to Ennia Thrasylla, the granddaughter of the astrologer Thrasyllus who was with Tiberius on Capri. See Cramer (1954), 105-6. The marriage occurred in either AD 29 or 30.

⁷¹ AE (1957), 250:

Q. Naevius Q. f. Fab. Cordus Sutorius Macro
praefectus vigilum praefectus praetori
Ti. Caesaris Augusti testamento dedit

Cf. de Visscher (1957a), 39-49; (1957b), 169-179. In another article, de Visscher proposes that Macro was *praefectus vigilum* by AD 24, though there is no direct evidence; see (1966), 766.

⁷² See de Visscher (1960), 248. Koestermann (1955), 364 argues that Macro was in charge of the guard on Capri, having gained the trust of Sejanus. See also Hennig (1975), 154.

became consul, though there is no mention of this in the sources.⁷³ Such an appointment would explain why Sejanus did not become suspicious when Macro was on Capri, for Macro could not have become interim prefect without Sejanus' knowledge. But the manner of his appointment to the command of the praetorians must remain a mystery. The emperor obviously had confidence in Macro, though it seems surprising that he would entrust someone with such a sensitive task whose only previous association with the regime was a satisfactory stint as the commander of the *vigiles*. The fact that he continued as sole prefect after the fall of Sejanus, however, indicates that Tiberius had no doubts about his loyalty, or his ability to control the guard.⁷⁴

Sejanus was arrested at a senate meeting held on the morning of October 18th; at a second meeting later in the day, the senate condemned him to death.⁷⁵ The guard was not involved at all, having been confined to camp by its new prefect as soon as Sejanus had entered the first meeting. It is instructive that the cohort was so easily convinced to return to quarters. Despite the concern about their loyalty as expressed in Dio, the soldiers did not disobey the orders of their

⁷³ Hennig (1975), 153 remarks on the practical difficulty of Macro simply changing commands overnight and argues therefore that Macro had become the substitute commander of the guard at the beginning of Sejanus' consulship.

⁷⁴ Barrett (1990), 28. Cf. Philo, *Legatio Ad Gaium* 6.37.

⁷⁵ Dio 58.11.4. Sejanus' children were also killed; Dio (58.11.5) reports that all three children were killed that same day, but evidence from the *Fasti Ostienses* (CIL 14, suppl. no. 4533, col. II, 15-17 = Ehrenberg and Jones [1949], 42) shows that this was not the case. Cf. also Tacitus, *Annals* 5.9.1; Levick (1976), 178.

new commander, though many may have wondered why they were being replaced by the *vigiles*.⁷⁶ The ease with which this transfer occurred is puzzling. Macro probably was known to the praetorians, but only in an adjunct capacity as prefect of the *vigiles* unless he had been appointed to the guard at the time of Sejanus' consulship.⁷⁷ That the cohorts would follow a new commander and not question their replacement at the senate meeting, or become alarmed at their confinement to quarters, is hard to understand. Certainly the guard understood that it had a responsibility to carry out the will of the emperor, regardless of the rationale, and the unquestioning attitude of the men in following Macro's orders may be seen as another example of the discipline of the praetorians.

As a result of its confinement, the guard could not come to Sejanus' rescue, though it is not certain that the soldiers would have attempted such an exploit anyway. A donative promised by Tiberius no doubt initially helped to silence any grumbling, but it was not enough.⁷⁸ Angered by the slight to their

⁷⁶ Dio 58.9.3. It is not clear why the praetorians were even at this meeting. It is true that they usually accompanied the emperor when he attended the senate, but Tiberius was not there. The most common interpretation is that they were with Sejanus, but the exact reason for their presence is not discernible. For views on Macro's role, see Hennig (1975), 151-56, especially 155; de Visscher (1966), 761-68. The choice of the *vigiles* clearly reflects the influence of Macro as the former *praefectus vigilum*.

⁷⁷ de Visscher (1966), 764-68 examines the possibility that there was a struggle between Macro and Sejanus which dated to long before AD 31 and which was exploited by Tiberius. See also Durry (1938), 156. Yet this view ignores the fact that Sejanus believed Macro on the morning of October 18 when told about the contents of the letter. If there had been any dissension between them, or rivalry between the guard and the *vigiles*, it is doubtful whether Sejanus would have trusted Macro. Cf. Hennig's criticisms (1975), 153, note 77.

⁷⁸ *Donative*: Suetonius, *Tiberius* 48.2; cf. Campbell (1984), 188: "Tiberius was not as lucky as Augustus, who had avoided this kind of donative which placed imperial largess back in the context of political strife as a reward for loyalty in time of personal danger for the commander."

honour which their replacement at the meeting signified, and by the sinister manner in which their commander had been removed, the soldiers rioted.⁷⁹ As has already been noted, the guard as a whole was a pragmatic group. By creating a public disturbance, the praetorians showed their anger at the implication that they would have been disloyal to the emperor, and their disappointment over their replacement by the *vigiles* at the meeting. At the same time, however, they were not willing to risk their privileged position in the city by attacking the state – that is the emperor – directly.

The reasons for the removal of Sejanus also remain a mystery, though the story of his plotting against Tiberius has found much favour among modern scholars, despite the lack of information in the sources.⁸⁰ As might be expected

⁷⁹ Dio 58.12.2: καὶ οἱ στρατιῶται ἀγανακτοῦντες ὅτι αὐτοὶ τε ἐς τὴν τοῦ Σειανοῦ εὐνοίαν ὑπωπτεύθησαν καὶ οἱ νυκτοφύλακές σφων ἐς τὴν τοῦ αὐτοκράτορος πίστιν προειρημήθησαν. ἐμπρήσεις τε καὶ ἀρπαγὰς ἐποιοῦντο, καίτοι πάντων τῶν ἐν ταῖς ἀρχαῖς ὄντων τὸ ἄστυ πᾶν ἐκ τῆς τοῦ Τιβερίου ἐντολῆς φυλαττόντων. It is unclear how the magistrates were guarding the city. It has been proposed that it was the *vigiles* who were involved in this task; see de Visscher (1957b), 174. Cf. Seager (1972), 221 who interprets the riot as resulting from “the slur that had been cast on their loyalty.”

⁸⁰ The list of references in the ancient sources to a conspiracy is brief:

Tacitus, *Annals* 5.8.1; 5.11.1; 6.14.1; 6.19.2; 6.47.2; possibly also 6.3; 6.8.3; 6.8.6; 6.23.2.

Suetonius, *Tiberius* 61.1; 75; possibly also *Vitellius* 2.3.

Juvenal, *Satire* 10.69-72.

Valerius Maximus, 9.11.4.

Seneca, *De Tranquillitate Animi* 11.11.

Possibly also Philo, *Legatio ad Gaium* 24.160.

The main source is Josephus, *AJ* 18.181-182. He records that Antonia, Tiberius' sister-in-law, had discovered a conspiracy against the emperor masterminded by the prefect and including most of the senators and freedmen as well as the army. She revealed the plan in a letter covertly sent to Tiberius. The only other mention of such a letter is an incidental reference in Dio's section on Vespasian; cf. Dio 66.14.1. It is unclear whether, as a member of the imperial household, Antonia had her own contingent of praetorians. If she did, it may explain how the letter was able to reach Tiberius without the knowledge of his prefect. How Antonia became aware of such a plot is unknown. It is possible that the source was Caligula, who had been living with her before being summoned to Capri. Cf. Levick (1976), 174; Bauman (1992), 158. For a summary of the most

of such a closely kept secret, details are lacking about the alleged conspiracy, namely who exactly was involved and whom it was against.⁸¹ That Sejanus would plot against the emperor himself seems unlikely, since there was little for him to gain by doing so.⁸² It is also difficult to accept that the prefect could have been so easily deceived. After all, Sejanus controlled both personal access and correspondence to Capri through the guard, and the idea that he had no advance warning of the danger of his situation is ludicrous. Yet, it is clear that he did not know what was to take place at the senate meeting of October 18, and that he considered Macro a loyal colleague.⁸³

The career of Sejanus was distinguished by achievements that had a great impact on the future of the praetorian guard. As prefect, he had brought about one of the major changes in its history, namely the concentration of the cohorts in the *Castra Praetoria*.⁸⁴ It is possible that, in the early years of his prefecture, he

prominent modern theories, cf. Hennig (1975), 144, note 40. The views range from Rogers (1935), 114: "Conspiracy against Tiberius and his throne by Sejanus may be accepted as historical fact", to Bird (1969), 85: "Motivation for any plot of long standing is entirely lacking."

⁸¹ In the absence of the account of Tacitus for the event, it is virtually impossible to reconstruct the details in any comprehensive manner, especially in light of the omission of the plot in Dio, our most complete source for the fall of Sejanus. Even this account is often treated as suspect, for many scholars dismiss Dio as being unreliable, arguing that he has allowed his understanding of the overthrow of Plautianus under Severus to influence his interpretation of the Sejanus episode, though he ought to be given more credit for being able to discern the difference. Cf. Koestermann (1955), 351-52; Meise (1969), 79; Hennig (1975), 148.

⁸² Cf. Seager (1972), 215-16; Boddington (1963), 7; Syme (1958), 406; 752-54; Durry (1938), 151; Marsh (1931), 309. Hennig (1975), 149-150 concludes after examining the sources that there is no real evidence for a plot, being convinced in particular by the lack of any motive.

⁸³ Cf. Hennig (1975), 150-51.

⁸⁴ Durry (1938), 156: "Il a été le vrai fondateur du prétoire."

recognized the benefits that would accrue to the state through having the praetorians housed together in a permanent camp in Rome. Through this accomplishment, Sejanus advanced the role of the guard in the civil administration greatly. There can be little doubt that Tiberius trusted Sejanus and gave him great responsibility which often went beyond the command of the guard. Yet, throughout his career, Sejanus always acted within the constraints of his position as prefect, undertaking to protect the interests of the emperor and of Rome.⁸⁵ The fact that, on several occasions, his attention to these duties inevitably involved him in the politics of the state should not be construed as political ambition on his part. It is unlikely that he had any illusions that his position would lead to supreme power. The office of prefect had not yet been precisely defined, and the presence of an equestrian closely associated with the emperor and commanding a large armed force in Rome probably added to the resentment felt by those involved in political life, and to the suspicions which no doubt contributed to his downfall.

Tiberius became increasingly fearful after the removal of Sejanus. He was troubled about his safety, not venturing from Capri too often, and indeed, never returning to Rome.⁸⁶ This, notwithstanding the fact that the guard had proven

⁸⁵ This may be the point that Velleius Paterculus was making in his assessment of Sejanus. As Woodman (1977), 251 points out, "V[elleius'] argument seems to be this. If the services of a certain man are required for the good of the state. . . that man should be given the political status appropriate to his actual (as opposed to hereditary) importance. . . otherwise he will not be seen to possess the proper influence. . . and his activities on behalf of the state will run the risk of being disregarded."

⁸⁶ Levick (1976), 217; cf. Tacitus, *Annals* 6.15.3.

itself loyal to the emperor in spite of its replacement at the senate meeting, and so could be trusted to ensure his safety to the best of its ability. Tiberius' insecurity is marked by two events relating to the guards that occurred shortly after the fall of Sejanus. His reaction to a proposal by Iunius Gallio that former members of the guard be allowed to sit in the fourteen rows at the theatre reserved for *equites* illustrates the sensitivity which the emperor felt concerning the praetorians. Tacitus reports that, after hearing of the request, the emperor wrote to Gallio, questioning his motives and accusing him of trying to subvert the discipline of the guard.⁸⁷ Dio explains Tiberius' response as resulting from the fear that Gallio was trying to persuade the guard to be loyal to the state rather than to the emperor.⁸⁸ Such a modification – making the praetorians indebted to the senate for one of their privileges – would subtly alter the dynamics of the relationship between the guard and the emperor, representing a loss of authority for Tiberius. Yet, at the beginning of the reign, it was Tiberius himself who had claimed that the soldiers, presumably including the guard among them, had allegiance to the state, not to him.⁸⁹ By this time, however, he had recognized the power that rested in the praetorians and knew that he had

⁸⁷ Tacitus, *Annals* 6.3.1-2. The date is AD 32. The result of Gallio's proposal was imprisonment in Rome after a brief exile on Lesbos.

⁸⁸ Dio 58.18.3-4.

⁸⁹ Dio 57.2.3: καὶ ἐπειδὴ γε κομψευσάμενός τις ἐπὶ τούτῳ φρουρὰν αὐτῷ ὥς οὐκ ἔχοντι δοθῆναι ἔσηγήσατο, τὸν τε χλευασμὸν αὐτοῦ συνῆκε, καὶ ἔφη καὶ ὅτι οἱ στρατιῶται οὐκ ἐμοὶ ἀλλὰ δημόσιοι εἰσι.

used it, and could use it again, to his own advantage. Gallio's transgression reminded him of this fact.⁹⁰

The second event occurred in AD 32. Togonius Gallus proposed that Tiberius be given an armed guard composed of twenty senators who would accompany him into their meetings.⁹¹ Yet, it was the responsibility of the praetorians to accompany the emperor to any meeting of the senate should he return to Rome.⁹² The proposal, then, by Gallus seems to have been an attempt to relieve the guard of this duty, perhaps as a means of reinforcing the position of the senate with the emperor, or of reducing the element of intimidation of the senate which the armed escort of soldiers represented. But it is not surprising that Tiberius did not respond well to the suggestion. Dio records that, shortly after this incident, the emperor did request an escort into the senate house, consisting of Macro and several military tribunes from the guard. Since Tiberius never intended to go to Rome again, Dio suggests that Tiberius' purpose was to prove to each group how he felt about them, and the message could not have

⁹⁰ Levick (1976), 204 notes that "... Gallio implied that Tiberius owed his survival to the loyalty of the Guard, and Tiberius did not like being reminded of debts of that kind." Cf. also Campbell (1994), 184: "... it was wise for [senators] to avoid the politically sensitive area of the emperor's relationship with his troops."

⁹¹ Tacitus, *Annals* 6.2-4; Dio 58.17.3-4. It appears that Gallus had misinterpreted a request from the emperor to have a consul escort him and act as a guard on a trip from Capri to Rome, as recorded by Dio (58.10.2): ὥς γοῦν οὐδὲ τὴν ὁδὸν ἀσφαλῶς ποιήσασθαι δυνάμενος, τὸν ἕτερον τῶν ὑπᾶτων μετεπέμψατο. The request is mentioned again at 58.13.3 when the consul Regulus goes to Capri to accompany Tiberius.

⁹² Tacitus (*Annals* 1.7.5) includes this escort by the guard into the senate as one of the indications that Tiberius had taken over the principate at the death of Augustus: *miles in curiam comitabatur*. See also Dio 58.17.4.

been clearer: the senators were to stay in their place, and the praetorians would be present to remind them of that.⁹³ That the senate would feel some uneasiness regarding the role of the personal army of the emperor at this time would not be unusual; the guard had proven their allegiance to Tiberius in the Sejanus affair and, given the uncertain relations between him and the senate, the possibility that force could be used against some of their members was always present. Dio even reports that this proposal by Gallus caused Tiberius to become more suspicious of the senate and as a result, he rewarded the guard in order to ensure their continued loyalty.⁹⁴

In the reign of Tiberius, then, the praetorian guard began to develop into a cohesive unit. The establishment of the *Castra Praetoria* not only provided a practical solution to the housing of the guard, it also enabled the cohorts to fraternize in a large group. Such interaction would have reinforced the attitude that they were an elite unit, responsible for the security of the emperor himself (even at the cost of the lives of influential citizens, or of members of the imperial family), and the well-being of the state. Their importance was clearly illustrated after the fall of Sejanus. At that time, Tiberius was generous in his rewards for the continued loyalty of the cohorts, even though they had never been given the opportunity to display their allegiance to him in a practical sense, being

⁹³ Dio 58.18.5. Cf. also Tacitus, *Annals* 6.15.2.

⁹⁴ Dio 58.18.2: τοὺς δὲ δορυφόρους καὶ λόγοις καὶ χρήμασι, καίπερ τὰ τοῦ Σειανοῦ φρονήσαντας εἰδώς, ἐτίμησεν.

sequestered in the camp before the event actually occurred. But, with the praetorians recognizing their unique status during the principate of Tiberius, the reign of Caligula was to see the influence of the guard on political matters even more clearly, beginning with his accession.

V. Caligula and Claudius

The question of the succession was of paramount importance in Rome during the last years of Tiberius' reign, and it is likely that the praetorians engaged in speculation among themselves over who would be the next emperor. No matter who succeeded Tiberius, the role of the guard in the principate was well established, but the attitude of the soldiers would have to be considered by any who would aspire to the position of power. The praetorians may have had a preference, perhaps being influenced by their prefect, who was actively supporting Caligula, Tiberius' great-nephew (and grandson by adoption).¹ The emperor was probably all too aware as well of the popularity of Caligula with the military in general, including the praetorians. Germanicus had been greatly admired, and Josephus reports that the army was especially fond of his son, to the point that they were willing to die in order that he might become emperor.²

Macro's movements in Tiberius' last years are difficult to ascertain. It is likely that he spent much of his time going between Rome and Capri, coordinating the various activities of the guard.³ This freedom of movement would have allowed him to keep informed about events in both places, much as

¹ For a complete discussion of the difficulties surrounding the various candidates for the position, see Barrett (1990), 37–40. The actions of Macro in the latter years of the reign are often understood in light of this allegiance to Caligula, and even Tiberius himself is said to have noted it; cf. Tacitus, *Annals* 6.45.3; 46.4. See also Dio 58.28.4; Philo, *Legatio ad Gaium*, 33–41; also 24; in *Flaccum*, 11–13; Suetonius, *Tiberius* 55.

² Josephus, *AJ* 18. 210.

³ See Balsdon (1934), 20; Levick (1976), 215; Schrömbges (1986), 361, note 90.

Sejanus had done before him. As a result of this surveillance, when the emperor died on the sixteenth of March AD 37 at Misenum, the arrangements for a smooth transition of power had already been put in place.⁴ The first action had been to send directives to the governors and the legionary commanders in the provinces, probably making use of the *speculatores* as the messengers, since they were able to travel quickly and discreetly.⁵ That the prefect of the guard would be the one to send out such an announcement, and that it seems to have been done even before Tiberius was dead (if one accepts Tacitus' chronology), shows where the authority rested in these last days. There is no mention of the senate or the consuls being involved in the mechanics of this transference of power, though Tacitus does report that meetings were held with men of importance in the emperor's entourage.⁶

Within two days of Tiberius' death, Macro had returned to Rome. It is likely that the praetorians who had been with Tiberius as well as the fleet at Misenum had already sworn the oath to the new emperor, and one of the prefect's first tasks in the capital would have been to inform the rest of the guard of the change of power and ensure their loyalty. The endorsement of the new

⁴ Whether Tiberius' death was due to natural causes, or was facilitated by outside forces is not clear. See Tacitus, *Annals* 6.50.5; Suetonius, *Tiberius* 73.2; *Caligula* 12.2; Dio 58.28.4; Philo, *Legatio ad Gaium* 25. Cf. Barrett (1990), 41; Balsdon (1934), 21-22. Tacitus (*Annals* 6.50.4) records that Charicles, Tiberius' doctor, informed Macro of the impending death. Barrett (1990), 41 points out that Charicles "seems to have been acting as Macro's agent."

⁵ Cf. Grant (1974), 141, and below, "The Guard as a Specialized Military Unit", 138.

⁶ Tacitus, *Annals* 6.50.4.

emperor by the praetorians through the swearing of the oath had become an integral part of the accession, and the initial approval of the guard was to become even more significant to future emperors. It clearly illustrates the importance that the personal troops of the emperor had attained in the dangerous period of the transition of power.⁷ The reaction of the soldiers to this particular change of emperor is not recorded, but it may be assumed that they were pleased at the promotion of the son of Germanicus.⁸

Caligula was prompt in fulfilling the bequests left to the soldiers and the citizens, in particular, in granting the donative to the guard.⁹ The amount left to them was doubled, and this increase must be seen as a means of rewarding the praetorians for their support. As Barrett points out "[Caligula] thus became the first, in a sense, to acknowledge, by such a gift, his debt to the Praetorians for his accession, and he established a precedent for his successors."¹⁰ Dio also adds

⁷ Barrett (1990), 53; Balsdon (1934), 25.

⁸ It took almost two weeks for Caligula to travel to Rome from Misenum. According to Suetonius, members of the guard accompanied the procession to the city, as had happened after the death of Augustus. Cf. *Tiberius* 75.3; *Caligula* 13. The purpose of this escort was twofold: as a mark of respect for Tiberius, and to maintain crowd control, for Caligula was greeted by great numbers of people as he travelled along the route.

⁹ Dio 59.2.1. See Scramuzza (1940), 61: "Their privileged position was emphasized anew when, after the example of Augustus, Tiberius at his death left each man 1000 sesterces. It is clear that henceforth every Emperor would make provisions in his will for the army, especially the Guard."

¹⁰ Barrett (1990), 60. Dio (59.2.3) records the amount given to the other city troops: 500 sesterces to the urban cohorts and 300 to the *vigiles* as per Tiberius' bequest. Watson (1969), 109 considers the donative to the latter unit to be "recompense for services rendered: the *vigiles* had been of considerable assistance to [Tiberius] in his action against Sejanus." They had not been singled out for grants under the conditions of Augustus' will; cf. Dio 56.32.3.

that, at the time when Caligula distributed the money, he watched the praetorians at drill, with members of the senate in attendance. This display is reminiscent of Tiberius' demonstration in AD 25, and should be viewed as a message to the senate in particular, but also to everyone else in Rome, of the power of the emperor's personal troops. It also emphasized the close relationship between Caligula and the praetorians, and was reinforced by the issue of a sestertius showing the emperor addressing five soldiers, with the legend ADLOCUT(io) COH(ortium).¹¹ Their prominence in the administration was thus advertised to the greater public even more emphatically.

Though we have virtually no information about the guard in the first year of Caligula's reign, they undoubtedly continued to perform the duties already familiar under Tiberius. Rather than the pretorians, it is Macro who attracted attention, for within a year of coming to power, Caligula had disposed of his prefect. At some time after the recovery from his illness in the fall of AD 37, Caligula apparently indicated to Macro that he was to have a new position, that of prefect of Egypt.¹² The transfer would remove Macro from the command that had the potential to do the greatest harm to Caligula, and would isolate him from the capital and, perhaps more importantly, from the soldiers there.¹³ The

¹¹ RIC I², 110, #32; see figure 3. The absence of SC on these coins has led to the theory that they may have been used to pay the soldiers; see Sutherland (1987), 69-70; Balsdon (1934), 34; Grant (1974), 143. Contra Barrett (1990), 268, note 50.

¹² Dio 59.10.6. This is the only mention of the appointment in the sources. Cf. Stein (1950), 28.

¹³ No doubt this precaution had something to do with the actions of Macro while Caligula had been ill. It may be that, during that time, the prefect had gone beyond what Caligula thought was

reason for the move is not known, but the transfer clearly would have been viewed by Macro as a demotion.¹⁴ Yet he did not make it to Egypt. Early in AD 38, the prefect and his wife, Ennia, committed suicide.¹⁵ An accusation had been made against them, though the details are unclear.¹⁶ It is possible that he was involved in a conspiracy, but the evidence is insufficient to draw any firm conclusions.¹⁷ There is no indication that the guard itself was in any way

appropriate. For example, among his responsibilities would have been what might be considered a minor task, that of giving the watchword to the guard. Technically, though, this action would have placed the cohorts at Macro's disposal for whatever end he chose, and it may well have been the subsequent mistrust over the ambitions of his prefect that prompted Caligula to act.

¹⁴ Though it was not until the Flavians that a definite *cursus* was established for these prefectures, the position in Rome included control of the praetorians and a place close to the emperor. Scholars are divided on which prefecture ranked highest. Those who argue for the praetorian prefect include Durry (1938), 140; 146; Hurley (1993), 107; Christ (1984), 71; Grant (1974), 144. Among those who believe that it was the prefect of Egypt are Barrett (1990), 273, note 24; Ferrill (1991), 106; Griffin (1976), 83; de Visscher (1957a), 45; (1960), 250.

¹⁵ Dio 59.10.6; Suetonius, *Caligula* 26.1; Philo, *Legatio ad Gaium* 61. The suicides of Macro and Ennia seem to have been motivated by a desire to retain their property within the family rather than risk it being confiscated by the state. In fact, Macro was able to bequeath enough money to his hometown of Alba Fucens for an amphitheatre to be constructed. Cf. de Visscher (1957a), 39-49; (1957b), 176-178; (1960), 252-3.

¹⁶ Philo (*Legatio ad Gaium* 52-59) records that Caligula contrived charges against the prefect because, among other things, he was tired of being reminded of the role Macro had played in the succession, in particular in ensuring the loyalty of the praetorians after the death of Tiberius. Cf. Barrett (1990), 78; Meise (1969), 247, with note 15; 249; Balsdon (1934), 38-9. But such an explanation is likely to mask something more serious and, in fact, one of the official charges against the prefect was sexual impropriety. Cf. Dio 59.10.6 (also 58.28.4); Philo, *Legatio ad Gaium* 39; 61; Tacitus, *Annals* 6.45.5; Suetonius, *Caligula* 12.2. See also Barrett (1990), 79; Hurley (1993), 34; Bauman (1974), 176; Balsdon (1934), 21; Meise (1969), 250, note 28.

¹⁷ Coincidentally, two other deaths of significance occurred around the time of Macro's demise: those of Gemellus and Caligula's father-in-law, Marcus Silanus. Cf. Dio 59.8.1; 4-6; Suetonius, *Caligula* 23.3. For Gemellus, see below, "The Guard as a Specialized Military Unit", 155-56. Whether these three deaths are connected in any way is impossible to determine, and any understanding of the events is complicated by the problems with chronology: was the appointment of Macro to the prefecture of Egypt before or after the deaths of Gemellus and Silanus? If evidence had emerged of some sort of arrangement between Gemellus and Silanus (among others), it is likely that the prefect would have been implicated, because any plan needed the support of the guard.

implicated in Macro's downfall, and there is no record of its reaction to his removal.¹⁸

The praetorians took part in several events in Caligula's reign. At the funeral of Drusilla, which was said to have been modelled after that of Augustus, members of the guard took part in a *decursio*.¹⁹ The involvement of the praetorians in such a display of honour for a person other than the emperor was unprecedented, and the participation of the emperor's personal troops emphasized the special bond between Caligula and his sister. In AD 39, things started to come to a head. One incident dated to this year was the crossing from Puteoli to Bauli on an artificially constructed bridge.²⁰ The reason for this event has eluded both ancient and modern scholars, though it may simply have been an extravagant spectacle.²¹ According to Suetonius, a great number of praetorians accompanied the emperor on his trip across the bridge, again

¹⁸ It is not known when a new praetorian prefect was appointed to the post, nor do we know who it was. Despite the assertion of several scholars that it was immediately after Macro's dismissal that the command of the guard reverted to being shared by two men, this is not supported by the sources, for Dio (59.11.2) speaks of only one praetorian prefect at the funeral of Drusilla in AD 38: οἱ τε δορυφόροι μετὰ τοῦ ἀρχοντός σφων. Contra Barrett (1990), 80; Balsdon (1934), 39–40, with note 1; Grant (1974) 144; Hurley (1993), 199. By AD 41, there were two prefects, one of whom was Marcus Arrecinus Clemens; see Suetonius, *Caligula* 56.1: *praefectorum praetori*; Dio 59.25.8: τοὺς ὑπάρχους. Cf. also Josephus, *AJ* 19.37. Nothing is known about Clemens' career prior to AD 41, though from *AJ* 19.45, it seems that he may have been advanced in age by that time. Hurley (1993), 199 is in error in saying that the elder Clemens was of senatorial rank; see Passerini (1940), 148.

¹⁹ Dio 59.11.2; cf. Suetonius, *Caligula* 24.1–2. See also Vogel (1973), 58; Balsdon (1934), 43.

²⁰ According to Dio, the event took place in AD 39; cf. 59.17.7–8. But as Barrett (1990), 211 points out, it is possible that the author included it in that year for convenience.

²¹ Cf. Maurer (1949), 100–101; Barrett (1990), 211–212; Hurley (1993), 73–74.

allowing the power of the imperial household troops to be displayed to a large audience.²² Dio adds that, after Caligula had praised them for their resolve, he rewarded them with a donative.²³ Since this grant is one of only three donatives recorded for the reign, it is likely that there was significance to the act beyond what is apparent in the sources, though it could be that the distribution of money to the praetorians at a very public display reinforced to others the strength of the guard and the special relationship between the soldiers and the emperor.²⁴

Under Caligula, the guard continued to perform various administrative duties, such as assisting the *vigiles* or providing security at the games. Because they were involved in such tasks, however, some scholars have concluded that the praetorians were treated poorly during Caligula's reign, and therefore readily joined the conspiracy which took his life.²⁵ Yet, it must be noted that most of these duties appear to have been no more than had been asked of the guard by previous emperors, and after the death of Caligula, there was concern that the praetorians would be outraged at the murder, which indicates that there

²² Suetonius, *Caligula* 19: *comitante praetorianorum agmine*. See also Josephus, *AJ* 19.5-6.

²³ Cf. Barrett (1990), 211, who suggests that the praise may have been due to the soldiers' involvement in the construction of the bridge. Speidel (1994), 21-2 argues that the entire episode was to show "the guard's readiness for a sudden strike by the engineering feat of the bridge . . . it proved the mettle of the Caligula's household forces . . ."

²⁴ It is possible that the grant of the donative was connected to the removal of Macro, though there is no evidence of this in the sources. Cf. Cramer (1954), 111.

²⁵ For example, Levick (1990), 29: "Gaius even antagonized the officers of the Praetorian Guard, by inflicting cruel duties and personal humiliation on them."

was still loyalty among the rank and file of the guard. That several praetorian officers felt otherwise is indisputable, but the motivation for their action is not at all clear. It is perhaps not surprising that the exact reasons for the assassination are not known; for the plan to succeed, those involved had to maintain a high level of secrecy.

The imperial praetorian guard had been developed by Augustus first and foremost for his own protection. Though the soldiers had been involved in many other tasks since the inception of the guard, the security of the emperor still remained their primary function, the one to which all the others were subordinated. It is remarkable, therefore, that, just over fifty years after their introduction, members from this unit would be responsible for the assassination of the man that they had sworn to protect. Yet, by AD 41, the guard was so firmly established as a vital part of the management of the state that several of its members were willing to risk their positions to advance other political aims through the elimination of the emperor. It should be remembered, however, that the conspiracy was restricted for the most part to a few officers. It is possible that the close association of these men with the emperor and with the administration meant that they were more easily influenced by the political scene around them, and therefore were corruptible. They also had easy access to Caligula through their personal contact with him. But they by no means represented the attitude of the entire force, which on the whole remained loyal to Caligula. Nevertheless,

the success in carrying out the assassination brought a increased recognition by all involved in political life in Rome that the praetorians were a powerful corps, and a potential threat, which must be taken into account in any decision taken by the emperor.

Dio and Suetonius record that there had been other plots against Caligula before AD 41, but they provide few details.²⁶ It is clear, however, that by AD 40, discontent against the emperor was widespread.²⁷ The details of the conspiracy are obscure, but officers of the guard appear to have been involved right from the beginning.²⁸ One of the major players was the praetorian tribune, Cassius Chaerea.²⁹ His participation is said to have resulted principally from resentment

²⁶ For example, Suetonius, *Caligula* 56.1; Dio 59.25.5b; 26.4. Although scholars generally have accepted the idea of two separate conspiracies in 40-41, Barrett (1990), 155 argues convincingly for the events to be part of a single plot. A crucial element in the success of any conspiracy is timing; it is unlikely that, given the constraints of time, two plots could have been conceived and then attempted within the few months available after Caligula's return to Rome.

²⁷ In that year, Caligula was granted an armed escort in the senate house, and guards for his statues; cf. Dio 59.26.3. This is the first reference to the need for guards to be placed near statues of the emperor, and it suggests that there had been a problem with vandalism or demonstrations centred around the images. Cf. Barrett (1990), 294, note 29. Dio (59.30.1a) also notes that, after Caligula's assassination, "his statues and his images were dragged from their pedestals . . ." It is possible, however, that the need for guards was connected with some problem with those seeking asylum at the statues. For the right of asylum associated with images of the emperors, see, for example, the advice given to Agrippina Maior to grasp the statue of Augustus when accused by Sejanus - Tacitus, *Annals* 4.67.6; cf. Bauman (1974), 85-87.

²⁸ The text of Tacitus is missing for this period, and so we are forced to rely upon Josephus and Dio for the details. It is possible, however, that Josephus made use of the history of Cluvius Rufus, who may have been an eyewitness to the assassination; cf. below, Appendix 1, "The Sources for the Julio-Claudian Period", 259.

²⁹ For his career, see Demougin (1992), #419. He had been present at the mutiny of the armies on the Rhine in AD 14 as an officer in one of the legions, and is described by Tacitus as a courageous young man; see *Annals* 1.32.5. We know nothing of his career under Tiberius. Balsdon (1934), 102-03 is incorrect in assuming Chaerea had not received any promotions since AD 14, for his tribunate in the guard was an advancement from his position in the legions, whatever he had done in between.

at the many personal insults to which he had been subjected by the emperor.³⁰

The inclusion of officers in the conspiracy suggests that the hostility against Caligula was rooted in something which had a direct effect on them rather than on the guard in general; it is impossible to say, however, what their dissatisfaction with him might have been.

The plot against Caligula was successfully executed in January of AD 41.³¹ The details of the assassination are obscure.³² But it is the involvement of the praetorians in the murder of Caligula that is significant. This was the first time that the emperor's private guard had taken part in an overtly political action. Although the impetus came from the officers, and the reasons which led to the act were varied and remain unknown for the most part, it was inevitable that a few of the rank and file of the guard would be drawn in by the conspirators who needed their cooperation, probably in anticipation of a reward. On the other hand, the murder of Caligula by the very soldiers who had taken an oath to protect him signalled a transformation in the imperial attitude towards the guard. The emperor's personal troops had played an important role at the transition of power between Augustus and Tiberius, and between Tiberius and Caligula by helping to ensure a smooth succession. Now, however, members

³⁰ Josephus, *AJ* 19.21; Suetonius, *Caligula* 56.2; Dio 59.29.2; Seneca, *De Cons.* 18.3-4; Pausanias 9.27.4.

³¹ For a discussion of the exact date, see Wardle (1991), 158-165.

³² Cf. below, "The Guard as a Specialized Military Unit", 159-161.

from the same unit had been the primary means by which the next succession had taken place, through an act of murder, and the assassins were men who had been promoted by the emperor himself. Such a step demonstrated to all that the praetorians could have a immense impact in the political arena in Rome, and sent a message to Claudius, and to those who came after him, that the officers of the guard in particular must be carefully chosen and closely monitored.

Shortly after the assassination of Caligula, Claudius found himself in the praetorian camp under the protection of the entire guard.³³ The next day, the urban cohorts and *vigiles* joined in swearing the oath of loyalty to the new emperor.³⁴ The urban cohorts may have been convinced to accept Claudius in the hope of receiving a sizable reward from the new emperor, since the praetorian guard had been promised a considerable donative by him for their loyalty.³⁵ The grant of a donative upon a change of emperor was not unusual,

³³ The actions of the guard after the murder are vague, for the account is garbled in Josephus and difficult to unravel. He offers two versions: that the praetorians decided at a meeting that they must provide their own candidate for emperor if they were to safeguard their position; their choice was Claudius. See *AJ* 19.162-165. The second version records that the acclamation occurred by accident when a soldier named Gratus stumbled upon Claudius hiding in the palace as members of the guard were rampaging through it; Gratus saluted him as emperor, and along with his comrades, escorted him back to the camp. See *AJ* 19.214-226; cf. also Suetonius, *Claudius* 10; Dio 60.1-3; Aurelius Victor, *Caes* 3.16. There are problems with both of these scenarios, however, and it is more likely that Claudius himself is implicated in the transfer of power, having prearranged with some of the conspirators (perhaps a group acting separately from Chaerea and his colleagues) a place in the palace where he could be found. Cf. Levick (1990), 35; 38; Barrett (1996), 72. Dio (60.1.3) may provide additional support for his involvement, for the wording of the text suggests that the soldiers were searching for someone specific.

³⁴ Josephus, *AJ* 19.253; *BJ* 2.211-212; Suetonius, *Claudius* 10.4; Dio 60.1.4.

³⁵ The amount of donative to be given by Claudius was either 15,000 sesterces (Suetonius, *Claudius* 10.4 where it is, in fact, only "promised") or 20,000 sesterces (Josephus, *AJ* 19.247 where a donative is also "promised" to the rest of the army). Cf. Levick (1990), 32; Mottershead (1986), 50.

though Suetonius records this particular instance as setting a precedent: *primus Caesarum fidem militis etiam praemio pignieratus*.³⁶ Upon his accession, however, Caligula had doubled the amount left to the praetorians in Tiberius' will, and it can be argued that that was the first time a reward had been given to the guard in exchange for its loyalty in the future.³⁷ Nevertheless, it is true that the donative given by Claudius was unique in that its size was larger than any previously bestowed, being five times the annual salary for a praetorian.³⁸ It has been suggested that, rather than the purchase of loyalty, the grant was made in lieu of any bequest from Caligula, but it seems clear that Claudius was interested in rewarding the praetorians for their role in his succession.³⁹ Evidence for this comes from two coins issued under Claudius; the first, with the legend IMPER(ator [or -atore]) RECEP(us [or -o]), shows the praetorian camp with a figure holding a spear and standing in front of a standard.⁴⁰ The other coin

³⁶ Suetonius, *Claudius* 10.4. Maxfield (1986), 28 remarks on Claudius' generosity to the praetorians in particular which "emphasiz[ed] the political character of many of these gifts - bribes to ensure and reward the loyalty of the army."

³⁷ Barrett (1990), 175. Sutherland (1987), 76 and Durry (1938), 366 agree with the assessment of Suetonius.

³⁸ Campbell (1984), 166-68 points to the "violent upheavals of the republic" as precedent for such a huge donative but suggests that the Claudian figure may have been "merely a convenient round sum." Cf. also Balsdon (1934), 105 who comments that "the troops were in a position to assess the value of the support that they were going to give [Claudius]."

³⁹ Garzetti (1974), 108.

⁴⁰ RIC 1² (1984), 122, #7. See figure 4. Grant (1974), 151: "These issues are unique in Roman imperial numismatics and military history. No other emperor, before or after Claudius, blatantly advertised that he owed the praetorians his throne." Cf. also Sutherland (1987), 75-76; Instinsky (1952/54), 7-8. Clay (1982), 42-43, however, argues that this figure is not a soldier as has been accepted traditionally, but rather is a female goddess representing *Fides Praetorianorum*,

depicts Claudius clasping hands with a soldier who has a shield and carries the standard; the legend reads PRAETOR. RECEPT.⁴¹ They first were minted in AD 41-2, but the type was reissued throughout the first five years of Claudius' reign, and must have been intended to reinforce the importance of the praetorians in his rule.⁴² The guard also was given one hundred sesterces per man on the anniversary date of the accession of the new emperor. There can be little doubt that Claudius understood the need not only to continue to show his gratitude to the praetorians, but also to keep the message of their support for him before the senate and the people through the continued minting of these coins.⁴³

One of Claudius' first acts as emperor was to execute Chaerea for his involvement in the conspiracy. By now, he had assured himself of the support of the guard and the execution of one of the tribunes was not likely to result in any hostility. In fact, the attitude of the praetorians after the murder, as it had been during crises in the past, was one of pragmatism. It is possible that, for many of the soldiers, the change in emperor was of limited significance. As long as their needs were looked after and they were well rewarded for their continued

illustrating the trust which Claudius had in the guard. The use of *dextrarum iunctio* on the other coin reinforces this idea.

⁴¹ RIC 1² (1984), 122, #11-12. See figure 5. Campbell (1994), 185: "They are so unusual, with their clear emphasis on comradely spirit and mutual support of emperor and soldier, that Claudius himself may have been directly responsible for their design. They celebrate an association between emperor and soldiers that Augustus had been at pains to conceal."

⁴² Cf. Levick (1990), 39.

⁴³ See Dio 60.12.4. Cf. Mottershead (1986), 50; Levick (1978), 95.

loyalty, there was little incentive to become involved in political intrigue. On the other hand, it certainly was in the new emperor's best interests to be rid of Chaerea: "Claudius recognized that he owed his own elevation in no small degree to Chaerea, but also saw the danger in the precedent of regicide."⁴⁴ The praetorian prefect, Clemens, who had refused to participate in the conspiracy, also disappears from the sources at this point, though it is not clear what happened to him.⁴⁵

Throughout Claudius' reign, the guard was employed in much the same way as under his predecessors, though often with additional emphasis on their importance in his accession. Praetorians accompanied Claudius in the senate, though by this time their attendance was not unusual since both Tiberius and Caligula had had similar escorts of soldiers.⁴⁶ But, by their presence, they also provided a constant reminder to the senators of the way in which Claudius had come to power.⁴⁷ The guard continued to be involved in such routine tasks in the city as the fighting of fires and providing security at the games. It is in the

⁴⁴ Barrett (1990), 176.

⁴⁵ Josephus mentions that Rufrius Pollio was appointed as the new praetorian prefect by Claudius immediately after his accession, and it has been assumed that Clemens was replaced; cf. Josephus, *AJ* 19.267. See also Jung (1972), 385; Barrett (1990), 176. Yet, this is by no means certain, and it is possible that Clemens was joined by Pollio in the prefecture, and that it was the other prefect who was dismissed.

⁴⁶ Suetonius, *Claudius* 12.1; cf. above, "Tiberius", 63, note 92.

⁴⁷ By 42, Claudius was attended in the senate by the prefects as well, and in 44, Rufrius Pollio was granted his own seat there. Cf. Dio 60.16. 3.

this reign that we first hear of soldiers, under the command of their tribunes and the prefect, taking part in beast hunts.⁴⁸ Claudius was also acutely aware of the dangers associated with being emperor, considering how he had attained power and the subsequent antagonism of the senate. The emperor's concern about his own security, therefore, led to increased activity for the praetorians, as he took measures to protect himself that seem to border on paranoia.⁴⁹ For example, praetorians were forbidden to enter the houses of senators, possibly to suppress any communication between the emperor's personal guard and those whom he had good reason to mistrust.⁵⁰ When a rumour circulated that the emperor had been assassinated, the people were furious with the guard because they thought that the soldiers had failed to protect him.⁵¹ Soldiers also were present during banquets, though whether this was something new is uncertain.⁵² Clearly there was danger for Claudius, acknowledged not only by him, but also by the general population.

⁴⁸ Suetonius, *Claudius* 21.3: *Africanas conficiente turma equitum praetorianorum, ducibus tribunis ipsoque praefecto*. Gaggero (1990), 483, note 10 argues that the prefect was Rufrius Pollio. See below, "The Guard in Civil Administration", 206-207.

⁴⁹ In AD 42, an attempt was made against Claudius by Lucius Arruntius Camillus Scribonianus and Annius Vinicianus; cf. Suetonius, *Claudius* 13.2; Dio 60.15.1-16.3. Cf. Levick (1990), 60; 208, note 19; Ehrhardt (1978), 62-3. The trial of the conspirators was held in the presence of the praetorian prefects, according to Dio (60.16.3). See below, "The Guard in Civil Administration", 218.

⁵⁰ Durry (1938), 366, interprets Suetonius, *Claudius* 25.1 – *milites domus senatorias salutandi causa ingredi etiam patrum decreto prohibuit* – as referring specifically to the praetorians. See also Campbell (1984), 36.

⁵¹ Suetonius, *Claudius* 12.3; Levick (1978), 87.

⁵² Suetonius, *Claudius* 35.1. See below, "The Guard as a Specialized Military Unit", 139.

Yet, in spite of these measures, it seems that there were times when even the security of the guard was breached. In AD 51 during a food shortage, a crowd of people accosted Claudius in the Forum, and demanded action; he barely escaped to the palace with the help of the praetorians.⁵³ It is odd that the mob should have been able to get so near to the emperor, given the presence of the soldiers and his own paranoia. We also hear of a certain Gnaeus Nonius who appeared armed before Claudius at the morning reception, and of another attempt against the emperor by an individual who had gained access to his bedroom.⁵⁴ The success of these men in getting through to the princeps when the guard was there to protect him, especially given the additional precautions taken by Claudius, suggests either serious problems with security or, more likely, complicity of guard members, though it is impossible to determine the exact reason.

The first half of Claudius' reign provides little information on the praetorian prefects. There was a quick succession of men in one of the two positions in these years, which may suggest that the emperor was concerned about the loyalty of his commanders. The man appointed upon Claudius' accession was Rufrius Pollio. Nothing is known about this man prior to his

⁵³ Suetonius, *Claudius* 18.2; Tacitus, *Annals* 12.43.1. Dio (60.33.10), however, dates this incident to AD 53 and blames Agrippina for the riot, but see Barrett (1996), 121.

⁵⁴ Tacitus, *Annals* 11.22.1; Suetonius, *Claudius* 13.1. These episodes could have provided the initiative for Claudius to have visitors searched when they arrived for their morning meeting; see Suetonius, *Claudius* 35.1; Dio 60.3.3.

appointment. Sometime before AD 43, he had been joined in the prefecture by Catonius Iustus, though we have no knowledge of when this occurred, or of what had happened to his predecessor.⁵⁵ Pollio was among those who accompanied Claudius to Britain in AD 43, no doubt as one of the emperor's inner circle. He also may have been involved in the administration of those guard members who were along to provide protection for the emperor. Upon his return, Pollio was granted a triumphal statue and the right to a seat in the senate whenever he attended with Claudius.⁵⁶ He disappears from our sources after this and we do not know the exact date of his removal from the prefecture.⁵⁷

According to Dio's chronology, the other prefect, Iustus, fell into disfavour with Messalina and was put to death in AD 43.⁵⁸ It has been assumed that the departure of Pollio to Britain in that year necessitated the transfer of the

⁵⁵ Iustus had been *primi ordinis centurio* in AD 14 in Pannonia under the command of Quintus Iunius Blaesus, but his career in the intervening period is unknown. Cf. Tacitus, *Annals* 1.29.2; see Demougin (1992), #428.

⁵⁶ Dio 60.23.2. He apparently was joined in this honour by Publius Graecinius Laco, the prefect of the *vigiles* at the fall of Sejanus; he also had gone to Britain with Claudius, and was granted a statue and a seat in the senate, as well as the consular *ornamenta*, and appointed procurator of Gaul. Cf. Dio 58.9.4; 60.23.3.

⁵⁷ It may be he who appears in the catalogue of those greeting Claudius in the *Apocolocyntosis*, where two praetorian prefects are listed. One is Catonius Iustus; the other name has been restored to Pollio. Cf. Roncali (1990), on 13.5; Ehrhardt (1978), 66; Meise (1969), 143. The difficulty with the emendation is that the list seems to consist of those who were victims of Claudius' regime, and there is no other evidence that Pollio belongs in that category, though Barrett (1996), 88 believes that he was executed. Cf. also Eden (1984), 142.

⁵⁸ Dio 60.18.3. Cf. Levick (1990), 56-57; Barrett (1996), 87; Dorey (1966), 150; Meise (1969), 140, note 64; 143.

command of the praetorian guard in Rome to the consul, Lucius Vitellius.⁵⁹ It would have been very unusual, however, for a senator to have been given this responsibility because the position had been reserved for equestrians from its inception. Moreover, since we have evidence of Claudius' mistrust of senators, it is unlikely that he would have entrusted his personal guard to the highest ranking member of the senate. We know that he even took senators with him to Britain "to be kept from mischief in Rome."⁶⁰ The burdens which fell to the consul in the absence of the emperor would have been quite extensive without the additional obligation of managing the guard, the majority of which would have remained in Rome.⁶¹

But if Vitellius did not have command of the praetorians when Pollio accompanied the emperor to Britain, there would need to be a second prefect who remained in Rome. This man would have to be someone whom Claudius felt he could trust and, in fact, there is a suitable candidate in Rufrius Crispinus, who possibly was a relative of Pollio.⁶² Crispinus was prefect in AD 47 when he

⁵⁹ Dio 60.21.2: τῷ Οὐιτελλίῳ τῷ Λουκίῳ τῷ συνάρχοντι τὰ τε ἄλλα καὶ τοὺς στρατιώτας ἐνεχείρισε. Cf. also Suetonius, *Vitellius* 2.4: *curam quoque imperii sustinuit absente [Claudio] expeditione Britannica*. See Melmoux (1988), 650; Levick (1990), 142: "In Rome Claudius entrusted everything to Vitellius, including command of the troops, probably appointing him Prefect of the City, even of the Guard as well."

⁶⁰ Levick (1990), 142.

⁶¹ Another explanation is possible if one understands the στρατιώτας in Dio as referring only to the urban cohorts, with Vitellius then given the same jurisdiction as an urban prefect, to command them and look after affairs in the city.

⁶² Tacitus, *Annals* 13.45.4; Dio 61.11.2. Cf. Levick (1990), 207, note 9. For Crispinus, see Demougin (1992), #586.

was sent by Claudius (at the instigation of Messalina) to arrest Valerius Asiaticus.⁶³ That year has been construed to be the one in which he was made prefect, but there is no firm evidence to support this, and it is plausible that he had been appointed as early as AD 43, especially if he was recommended by Pollio, who was highly regarded by the emperor.⁶⁴ Crispinus was handsomely rewarded for his action in arresting Asiaticus, being granted the *insignia praetoria* and given a million and a half sesterces.⁶⁵ Joined in the command of the guard by Lucius Lusius Geta before 48, it was in that year that the two prefects were involved in the downfall of Messalina.⁶⁶

The affair of Messalina and Gaius Silius emphasized the vital role of the guard in the reign of Claudius.⁶⁷ There can be little doubt that there was some fear among his advisors that members of the guard might be convinced to desert to the side of Silius and Messalina.⁶⁸ As wife of the emperor, she would have

⁶³ Tacitus, *Annals* 11.1.3.

⁶⁴ An earlier date for Crispinus' appointment is also suggested by the enmity which Agrippina felt towards him, for she suspected him of sympathies towards Messalina and her children, and had him removed in AD 51 along with his colleague. See Tacitus, *Annals* 12.42.2; below, 90.

⁶⁵ Tacitus, *Annals* 11.1.3; 4.3. Cf. Barrett (1996), 122 who refers to him as "playing an active role as Messalina's hireling." Crispinus may also have been awarded the *insignia consularia* at a later date; cf. Tacitus, *Annals* 16.17.2. Many scholars believe that Tacitus has erred in this passage. See, for example, Syme (1958), 747; Rudich (1993), 298. But Griffin (1984), 68 argues that Crispinus was so honoured, in consolation for losing the praetorian prefecture to Burrus in 51. Cf. also Durry (1938), 176; Passerini (1939), 280.

⁶⁶ Cf. Melmoux (1983), 354-55. For Geta, see Demougín (1992), #484.

⁶⁷ On the question of whether there was a conspiracy, see Barrett (1996), 91-94; Meise (1969), 123-168; Bauman (1974), 177-88.

⁶⁸ Most scholars have accepted the story of the replacement of Geta by Narcissus as prefect for the day; cf. Durry (1938), 367, with note 3; Passerini (1939), 280, who even gives Narcissus his own

had a personal escort of praetorians, undoubtedly among those attendants said to have gone with her when she visited Silius.⁶⁹ There was probably apprehension that these soldiers could have been used by her in an attempt to subvert their colleagues, much as Agrippina was later accused of doing.⁷⁰ But, in reality, it is extremely unlikely that any of the praetorians would have considered deserting Claudius.⁷¹ It was simply the perception that the guard could be influenced by Messalina that caused concern, and that resulted in the removal of both her and her followers.⁷²

entry as prefect; Barrett (1996), 77; 92; 122; 128; Levick (1990), 65; Mehl (1974), 80, who includes Geta as an active participant in a conspiracy; Dorey (1966), 153, especially with note 7. Yet, the only evidence for this substitution is a passage from Tacitus, in which he records a private conversation between Claudius and his advisors. Cf. *Annals* 11.33: *trepidabatur nihilo minus a Caesare: quippe Getae praetorii praefecto haud satis fidebant, ad honesta seu prava iuxta levi, ergo Narcissus adsumptis quibus idem metus, non aliam spem incolumitatis Caesari adfirmat, quam si ius militum uno illo die in aliquem libertorum transferret, seque offert suscepturum*. Since there was still concern at this time over whether the loyalty of any of the praetorians had been compromised, it does not seem logical for a change of command to be considered before the attitude of the guard was known. Tacitus is concerned to stress here that the guard was given over to the command of a freedman, for he uses the expression *in aliquem libertorum transferret*, and only then mentions that Narcissus offered himself for the job. It may be that the point of the sentence, therefore, is to highlight the power to which Narcissus had risen.

⁶⁹ Tacitus, *Annals* 11.12.3.

⁷⁰ See below, "Nero", 98.

⁷¹ Sympathy for her cause might be gained through the presentation of Britannicus to the praetorians; as an infant, he had been commended to the soldiers by Claudius. See Suetonius, *Claudius* 27.2; cf. Mottershead (1986), 113. It seems that members of one of the imperial gladiatorial schools as well as some of the *vigiles* were involved. Both the *procurator ludi*, Sulpicius Rufus and the prefect of the *vigiles*, Decrius Calpurnianus, were removed after the exposure of the affair. Cf. Tacitus, *Annals* 11.35.3. See also Mottershead (1987), 108; Meise (1969), 156-7.

⁷² For the details, see below, "The Guard as a Specialized Military Unit", 164-166.

It was under Claudius that recruitment for the guard was first extended beyond the central regions of Italy.⁷³ For some time, there had been soldiers from the Anauni, an Alpine community, serving as praetorians and even reaching the rank of officer, though the tribe did not have Roman citizenship. It is not clear how many soldiers were involved, how they had been able to obtain such privileges, nor how long this practice had been going on. It was partly because of the Anauni serving in his guard that Claudius decided to extend citizenship to the tribe as a whole. The grant was detailed in an inscription which dates to 46.⁷⁴ The relevant lines of the inscription are: *quod | pler[i]que ex eo genere hominum etiam militare in praetorio | meo dicuntur, quidam vero ordines quoque duxisse*. These men had used their usurped status to join the guard, but Claudius viewed this in a positive manner since they had served the princeps faithfully, and he confirmed what in principal they already had as praetorians.⁷⁵ Rather than granting citizenship to a few, however, he chose to extend it to the tribe as a whole.⁷⁶ The entire episode is somewhat puzzling, since it is difficult to

⁷³ For recruitment in the guard, see above, "Augustus", 28-29.

⁷⁴ CIL 5.5050. For the inscription in general, see Frézouls (1981), 238-252. Durry (1938), 241, 252 connects the extension of recruitment to the increase in the number of cohorts which he had attributed to Claudius, but now, see above, "Tiberius", 43-48. Cf. also Levick (1978), 91; Scramuzza (1940), 129-131.

⁷⁵ One of the prerequisites to being a soldier in the guard was Roman citizenship, and the length of time that these men had served meant that they virtually possessed it, as shown by lines 25-26 of the inscription: *cum longa | usurpatione in possessionem eius fuisse dicatur*. Cf. Frézouls (1981), 249.

⁷⁶ Frézouls (1981), 246-7. Scramuzza (1940), 277, note 11 notes that "the acquisition of the franchise by irregular and surreptitious methods was an old practice", but Frézouls (1981), 244, note 31 points out that this claim pertains to individuals, not entire communities.

comprehend how these men could have gained such status without citizenship, though the methods of record keeping for new recruits may not have been precise. Why Claudius felt compelled to grant citizenship to the entire tribe rather than just to those men who were members of his household troops is also not clear. If they had served for a considerable length of time, it simply may have been a generous gesture on the part of the emperor.

The guard appears only occasionally in the sources for the remaining years of Claudius' principate, but there can be little doubt that the praetorians were always visible in the city and were displayed by the emperor at every opportunity.⁷⁷ Claudius was astute enough to realize the advantages which could be gained from keeping his praetorians in the public eye, given the dissatisfaction of the senate with his rule. In AD 49, shortly after Claudius had married his niece Agrippina, a tribune of the guard was sent to ensure that Lollia Paulina (who had been perceived as a rival by the empress) carried out the order of suicide.⁷⁸ It is possible to see Agrippina's hand in this, and before long, she had also begun to ensure the loyalty of the praetorian officers to her and to her cause (namely the promotion of her son Nero) through the replacement of some of the tribunes and centurions. The officers removed were those who had shown

⁷⁷ For example, in AD 49, they were with Claudius when Mithridates was paraded before the public; two years later, the guard was exhibited before the camp to Caratacus and the people of Rome in what once again must have been a show of power. Cf. Tacitus, *Annals* 12.21; 36.10. See Barrett (1996), 124. The same reasoning was behind the display of the guard when Tiridates came to Rome in AD 66; cf. Dio 63.4.2-3; Suetonius, *Nero* 13.1.

⁷⁸ Tacitus, *Annals* 12.22.3; cf. Dio 60.32.4.

sympathy for Britannicus. The empress clearly understood the need for the praetorians to be supportive of Nero in any struggle for the principate which might occur after Claudius' death, and she knew that, in the past, the way this had been accomplished was through the officers. Agrippina's methods of replacing these men were such that her intentions could not be questioned, for she invented reasons for the dismissal of some of the soldiers, and had others promoted.⁷⁹ We do not have any information about the reaction of these officers to their transfers, but it is possible that there was some ill will among those dismissed, since discharge from the city cohorts was bound to cause bitterness. It is also likely that the contingent of the guard that had been assigned to protect Britannicus had already been replaced by soldiers appointed by Agrippina, for the sources mention that he was virtually a prisoner in his isolation, and the use of the guard to enforce such segregation is well attested.⁸⁰ These manoeuvres by Agrippina will not have gone unnoticed by the rank and file of the praetorians. Their attitude to such a high-level reorganization is not known, though the replacement of officers would have had a direct effect on them.

⁷⁹ Tacitus, *Annals* 12.41.2: *simul qui centurionum tribunorumque sortem Britannici miserabantur, remoti fictis causis et alii per speciem honoris*. Cf. Barrett (1996), 118-21. The nature of this action by Agrippina must be that she recommended to Claudius that certain officers be replaced and others promoted, for she had no authority of her own to accomplish such changes. The promotion from the rank of officer in the guard, especially from centurion, to the centurionate of a legion was a common practice. See below, "The Guard in Civil Administration", 188-194.

⁸⁰ Tacitus, *Annals* 12.26.2; cf. Dio 60.32.6. See below, "The Guard as a Specialized Military Unit", 150-151.

In AD 50, Nero was adopted by Claudius, and the following year, a donative was given to the troops upon his assumption of the *toga virilis*.⁸¹ It is recorded that Nero also announced a *decursio* of the praetorians and even led them himself, shield in hand.⁸² Such a display will have served to ingratiate the young man to the soldiers, and to promote a close bond between them. Soon after Nero's entry into public life, Agrippina further strengthened her position through the replacement of the two prefects by one man, Sextus Afranius Burrus.⁸³ The reason which she supposedly gave to Claudius for the dismissal of Crispinus and Geta was the need for stricter discipline for the praetorians; she argued that this would be accomplished more easily through the command of a single prefect. It is not clear whether there had been problems with the control of the guard, though it is possible that Agrippina was able to use as an excuse the demonstration over food shortages which that same year had put Claudius in

⁸¹ Tacitus, *Annals* 12.41.2.

⁸² Suetonius, *Nero* 7.2: *indictaque decursione praetorianis scutum sua manu praetulit*. Cf. Speidel (1994), 27. The military *decursio* was the precursor of the funereal type; cf. Richard (1966), 314, note 2. During Nero's reign, a coin was issued which illustrated the *decursio* scene; it may have been to commemorate this event, though it also served to reinforce the close relationship between the emperor and his guard. Cf. RIC I², 162, #163–173; Grant (1974), 165. See figure 6.

⁸³ Tacitus, *Annals* 12.42.2; Dio 60.32.6^a. Geta was given the post of prefect of Egypt, a move which had been used in the past to remove praetorian prefects from Rome. Cf. "Tiberius", 39, note 11 (Seius Strabo); above, 69–70 (Macro). He was to remain in that post until AD 54 at least, for we have an inscription from Egypt dated to that year which refers to him; cf. ILR 1.1118 (=OG 1.664). The inscription dates to some time after the death of Claudius. The cognomen Γέτας has been erased. Cf. Hirschfeld (1963), 347, note 3. Geta's colleague, Crispinus, outlived Agrippina, and his next appearance in our sources is when he is accused of involvement in the Pisonian conspiracy in AD 65. See below, "Nero", 108.

some danger in the Forum.⁸⁴ Of greater significance to Agrippina than Claudius' security, however, the appointment of Burrus eliminated those prefects whom she perceived as having been supportive of Messalina, and thus loyal to Britannicus.⁸⁵ It seems clear that, with Nero now able to stand for office, Agrippina was anticipating that the struggle between Nero and Britannicus would not be far off, and wanted to ensure that her partisans were in the positions from which they could provide the greatest assistance.⁸⁶

Burrus was well known to the imperial family. He was from Vasio in Gallia Narbonensis where an inscription was set up in his honour:

Vasiens. Voc. | patrono, | Sex. Afranio Sex. f. |
 Volt. Burro, | trib. mil., proc. Augus | tae, proc.
 Ti. Caesar., | proc. divi Claudii, | praef. pra[e]tori,
 orna | m[ent]is consular.⁸⁷

⁸⁴ Barrett (1996), 121.

⁸⁵ The timing of the replacement is interesting, since both Crispinus and Geta had been able to continue in their positions until AD 51, that is, for three years after the death of Messalina, and for two years after Agrippina's marriage to the emperor. Levick (1990), 74 believes that there were two other prefects appointed after the fall of Messalina and before the appointment of Burrus. There is, however, no evidence for this idea and it is difficult to understand why a change of prefects at that time would not have elicited a comment from our sources. Scholars often have not fully considered the time lapse before Agrippina had the prefects dismissed; for example, Rudich (1993) 148: "Upon Messalina's fall, [Crispinus] was dismissed under pressure from Agrippina, who had championed Afranius Burrus. . ."

⁸⁶ Cf. Levick (1990), 74; Sutherland (1985), 86; Faider (1929), 186. Of course, Agrippina had already arranged that several of the tribunes and centurions would support Nero; as Barrett (1996), 121 notes, "the change of officers at a lower level would have an effect on the rank and file which the more remote prefect could not possibly match."

⁸⁷ CIL 12.5842 (=ILS 1321). Cf. Demougin (1992), #552; Barrett (1996), 122; McDermott (1949), 230-234. Three other inscriptions associate Burrus with this area in Gaul; cf. *ibid.*, 233-4.

Burrus had been *tribunus militum* as a young man, though it is not known where, and there is no other record of military service.⁸⁸ Tacitus refers to him as *egregiae militaris famae*, but this distinction could refer to the respect which the praetorians had for him when he was their commander rather than to any experience in the field.⁸⁹ He began his civil career as procurator for Livia, and after her death, was retained by Tiberius and Claudius.⁹⁰ The connection with the imperial household would have brought him into contact with Agrippina, and his appointment as praetorian prefect should be viewed in that context.⁹¹ At some point, Burrus also was awarded the *consularia ornamenta*, a detail recorded on the inscription at Vasio, but neglected by the historians.⁹² We do not know when or

⁸⁸ Burrus' date of birth was probably in the last decade of the first century BC; cf. Barrett (1996), 122. For possible explanations for the lack of further military service, see Bloch (1885), 4-5; de la Ville de Mirmont (1910), 85.

⁸⁹ *Annals* 12.42.1. A similar term (*militum fama*) is used of a later praetorian prefect, Faenius Rufus, though no military experience other than the command of the guard is known for him either. Cf. Tacitus, *Annals* 14.51.3; Griffin (1976), 82, note 5. Syme (1958), 623-4 notes the possibility that Tacitus hailed from the same region as Burrus and was "amicably disposed" towards him, hence the exaggeration of military distinction.

⁹⁰ It is possible that he also had held the same position under Caligula whose name has been omitted from the inscription. Cf. de la Ville de Mirmont (1910), 83; McDermott (1949), 233. In order to explain the reference in Tacitus to Burrus' military distinction, some scholars have postulated that his posting under these emperors was as governor in a procuratorial province; cf. Bloch (1885), 6-8; de la Ville de Mirmont (1910), 85-6. But such a position was not likely to bring military fame since it was mostly civil in character. See Barrett (1996), 122; McDermott (1949), 232; Waltz (1910), 244.

⁹¹ Cf. Waltz (1909), 171; Durry (1938), 368 even refers to Burrus as "Agrippina's creature." McDermott (1949), 248-254, however, sees Burrus as a protégé of Seneca.

⁹² This omission is unusual, since it is possible that he was the first praetorian prefect to receive such an honour. Cf. Bloch (1885), 15; McDermott (1949), 233. But see above, note 65.

why he was honoured in this way, though it is possible that his role in the accession of Nero provided the rationale.⁹³

Agrippina had to wait for three years after the appointment of Burrus before Nero came to power. Claudius died in AD 54, either of natural causes or aided by his wife, and everything had been thoroughly prepared for the sequence of events which followed.⁹⁴ All knowledge of the emperor's death was kept secret, and Britannicus and his two sisters were kept isolated, no doubt watched over by members of the guard.⁹⁵ Even the praetorians were not informed, which is ironic given the role they were to play in the accession of the new emperor. Such a precaution seems to indicate a lack of confidence that everything would go smoothly despite all the careful planning. The concern may have been that there were some among the guard who would question the whereabouts of Britannicus as Claudius' natural son, and cause dissension among the soldiers. Finally, however, Burrus and Nero approached the cohort on duty at the palace and, at the command of the prefect, Nero was cheered by

⁹³ Barrett (1996), 122; Griffin (1984), 69; McDermott (1949), 233. Bloch (1885), 16, however, argues that the grant occurred under Claudius because he freely gave such distinctions to others.

⁹⁴ On the question of murder, see Barrett (1996), 140–42. The preparations included the removal of Narcissus from Rome, since it was believed he could have caused problems for the smooth transfer of power. Cf. Tacitus, *Annals* 12.65.2–66.1; Dio 60.34.4; Barrett (1996), 139–40.

⁹⁵ Tacitus, *Annals* 12.68.2–3. The guard was used to restrict access to the palace until the appropriate time. These arrangements are reminiscent of those taken by Livia at the death of Augustus; see above, "Tiberius", 37.

the praetorians and then taken to their camp.⁹⁶ No mention is made in the sources of who was responsible for these arrangements, but it is probable that Burrus had acted in concert with Agrippina. Both Tacitus and Suetonius record that the delay in proclaiming the new emperor was to allow Nero to take over at the best time as calculated by astrologers, but it was probably also to guarantee that there would be no problem with the guard at the transfer of power.⁹⁷ The involvement of Burrus in the planning process would have ensured that the contingent on guard at the palace was one whose commander was favourable to Agrippina (and thus to Nero), and so it was easy to silence the few grumbings about Britannicus heard after the reception of Nero at the palace. Yet, Tacitus uses language that suggests that the cheers of the praetorians for the new emperor were not spontaneous but had to be prompted by Burrus, and so the precautions which had been taken by Agrippina may have been warranted.⁹⁸

Upon his arrival in the *Castra Praetoria*, Nero gave a speech in which he promised the same size of donative which his adoptive father had given to the soldiers. There can be little doubt that this was to ensure future loyalty and was not a condition of Claudius' will. The entire guard immediately swore the oath to

⁹⁶ Tacitus, *Annals* 12.68.3-69.3; cf. Josephus, *AJ* 20.151-2; Suetonius, *Claudius* 45.1; *Nero* 8; Dio 61.3.1.

⁹⁷ Cf. Barrett (1996), 142; Griffin (1984), 33; Timpe (1962), 100.

⁹⁸ Tacitus, *Annals* 12.69.1: *monente praefecto faustis vocibus exceptus [sc. Nero]*. Cf. Barrett (1996), 142-3; Bradley (1978), 63.

Nero, and their choice was soon ratified by the senate.⁹⁹ The support of the praetorians once again had been a precondition of attaining power in Rome.

⁹⁹ Cf. Martin (1991), 42; Campbell (1984), 185-6.

VI. Nero

It was primarily because of the support of the guard that an accession had occurred without challenge. Most of the rank and file probably welcomed another descendent of Germanicus as their supreme commander. Nero himself clearly understood the machinations which had brought him to power.¹ In the early stages of the reign, the role of Burrus in assisting the young emperor is well documented.² His primary task would have been to manage the affairs of the guard. This responsibility took on greater significance after conflict had erupted over the dominance of Nero between Agrippina and the two men whom Tacitus calls the *rectores imperatoriae iuventutis*, Seneca and Burrus himself.³ The prefect undoubtedly felt confident that, in any confrontation between the emperor and his mother, the loyalty of the guard for Nero would not be compromised, although certainly there would be sympathy among the praetorians for Agrippina. But it would be his control of the soldiers that would be instrumental in maintaining order. Through his earlier influence under Claudius and later

¹ It is recorded that, on the first day of his rule, Nero gave to the tribune of the cohort on duty at the palace the watchword *Optima Mater*, an indication of his recognition of the debt to his mother. See Suetonius, *Nero* 9; cf also Tacitus, *Annals* 13.2.3. Durry (1938), 275 is in error when he has Agrippina give the password in place of Nero, which would have elevated her to a status above her son, for that was one of the responsibilities of the supreme commander of the guard.

² Tacitus (*Annals* 13.2.1) refers to the prefect's sternness of character and his military management as assets which he brought to his position: *Burrus militaribus curis et severitate morum*. See also 13.6.3 where he is said to be experienced in many things; Dio 62.13.1-2, where Burrus' bluntness of speech when dealing with Nero is recorded; Seneca, *De Clementia* 2.1.2 where Burrus is called *vir egregius et tibi [Neroni] principi natus*.

³ Tacitus, *Annals* 13.2.1.

with Nero, Burrus likely had managed to place associates from his home province of Gaul among the ranks of the praetorians, which could only help to strengthen his command of the soldiers.⁴

There is not much recorded in the sources concerning the activities of the guard in the early part of Nero's reign. By this time, the machinery of the state functioned for the most part without regard for who was in power, and the administrative responsibilities which the praetorians had had in the past would have continued under Nero. It was the obligation of the tribunes and centurions, and their junior officers, to ensure that these duties were carried out efficiently, and the change in emperor would have made little difference in this routine. But it is likely that the close relationship between the emperor and his personal army was stressed by the regime at every opportunity, probably through the agency of Burrus, and this emphasis on the importance of the guard to Nero's rule may have contributed to Agrippina's frustration with her diminishing role in the reign.⁵

⁴ The evidence for Burrus' influence in appointments admittedly is tenuous, but his close relationship with both Claudius and Nero must have provided him with the means to suggest men for positions, though it is impossible to say how much effect he had on gaining promotions or transfers for his fellow countrymen. For officers from Narbonensis who may have benefitted from Burrus' intervention on their behalf, see Demougin (1992), #505 (Maxumus, a tribune of the II cohort under Claudius); #539 (Iulius Pollio, tribune of the III cohort under Nero); #546 (Tiberius Iulius Ustus, tribune of the VIII cohort under Nero). Cf. also Griffin (1976), 84-5; 251-4; Syme (1988), 139. Barrett (1996), 241, however, notes that "there is little direct evidence that Burrus was able to secure appointments for colleagues."

⁵ When Agrippina realized that she had lost her hold on her son, her response was to claim that she would take Britannicus to the *Castra Praetoria* and present him to the troops as Claudius' legitimate heir. Cf. Tacitus, *Annals* 13.14.3. There is no indication that the guard would have been willing to rally to her cause and risk losing its privileged status. Not long after Agrippina made this threat, Britannicus died; see below, "The Guard as a Specialized Military Unit", 167-168.

Within a year, Nero's attitude towards his mother was made absolutely clear when he banned Agrippina from the palace and withdrew the contingent of guards who accompanied her: [*Nero*] *excubiasque militares, quae ut coniugi imperatoris olim, tum ut matri servabantur, et Germanos nuper eundem in honorem custodes additos digredi iubet.*⁶ The term *excubias* in this passage refers to the members of the praetorians who were with Agrippina at all times, not just in the palace but also when she went out in public.⁷ As the mother of the emperor and previously as the wife of Claudius, Agrippina had had an assigned number of soldiers as her own bodyguard, though the exact strength is difficult to determine.⁸ As well, some members of the *Germani corporis custodes* recently had been added, perhaps when Nero became emperor. Agrippina's contingent of praetorians was surely as much for a show of status as for protection. This made

⁶ Tacitus, *Annals* 13.18.3. Cf. also Suetonius, *Nero* 34.1. At the same time, Nero was surrounded by a large group of officers whenever he went to visit his mother in her new residence and, according to Dio (61.8.4), he declared that no one except the emperor should have soldiers to guard them. Barrett (1996), 173 sees this action as "part of a broader package, in which the general duties of the guard were redefined", but the connection between the removal of the guard from Agrippina and other issues – such as the removal of the guard from the games – is tenuous.

⁷ Contra Koestermann (1965), vol. 3, 269 who distinguishes the guards who are *excubiae* (the palace watch) from those who are *custodes* (the permanent guard for attendance in public). But it seems clear from the text that *custodes* refers to the German bodyguard (as in Suetonius, *Caligula* 55: *Germanis corporis custodibus*) whereas *excubiae militares* are the praetorians. This is the same term as was used to indicate that Tiberius had adopted all the trappings of power after the death of Augustus – he was attended by bodyguards (*excubiae*); cf. Tacitus, *Annals* 1.7.5. The term is used elsewhere with reference to watches in the city itself, not just at the palace, for which the word *excubitores* is more common. See, for example, Tacitus, *Annals* 1.17.6 where, in the section setting out the complaints of the Pannonian legions about their service, the guard is referred to as *urbanas excubias*. Cf. also Suetonius, *Augustus* 23.1; *Claudius* 10.3. For *excubitores*, see Suetonius, *Claudius* 42.1; *Nero* 8.

⁸ It is unlikely, however, that Agrippina would have had two cohorts accompanying her, as claimed by Durry (1938), 277.

their dismissal all the more disturbing to her.⁹ The removal of the praetorians may have been intended to illustrate that the grant of a bodyguard was the emperor's to bestow or to take away. Of course, it also ensured that Agrippina could not continue to associate with the soldiers, and signalled that the relationship between Nero and his mother had changed substantially.¹⁰ The ostensible reason for the withdrawal of the soldiers was that Agrippina had been courting the loyalty of the praetorians (among others) considered by Nero as an attempt at subversion.¹¹ But it is more likely that she was simply trying to ingratiate herself with the soldiers, not turn them against the emperor. The removal of the guard brought an end to this.¹² There is no record of the reaction of the praetorians to their removal from Agrippina. Some of the soldiers undoubtedly had sympathy for her, both as the mother of the emperor and the daughter of Germanicus, but their allegiance was bound to remain with the man

⁹ The consequence for Agrippina of the deprivation of this bodyguard and of being denied quarters in the palace was that she was shunned. Cf. Tacitus, *Annals* 13.19.1; Dio 61.8.6.

¹⁰ In fact, shortly after her isolation, no doubt bolstered by the obvious change which had occurred in Agrippina's status, a charge of inciting revolution was brought against her by a former friend, Junia Silana. Cf. Tacitus, *Annals* 13.19-21.

¹¹ Tacitus, *Annals* 13.18.2: *tribunos et centuriones comiter accipere, nomina et virtutes nobilium, qui etiam supererant, in honore habere, quasi quaereret ducem et partes.*

¹² Though it is not at all clear that Agrippina was trying to convince the praetorians to be disloyal to Nero, it has been argued recently that the grant of free grain to the praetorians should be assigned to this year as a means of his "winning [them] over." Cf. Barrett (1996), 173. Yet there is no compelling reason to discard the text of Tacitus (*Annals* 15.72.1), in which this reward is closely connected to events after the Pisonian conspiracy in 65: *quibus perpetratis Nero et contione militum habita bina nummum milia viritim manipularibus divisit addiditque sine pretio frumentum, quo ante ex modo annonae utebantur.* The phrase *quibus perpetratis* refers to the executions carried out after the disclosure of the Pisonian conspiracy, described in the previous chapter. Suetonius (*Nero* 10.1) also mentions the reward for the guard, but in the context of other grants made by Nero.

who was ultimately responsible for their pay and benefits. Any affection for Agrippina, then, should not be viewed as a lack of devotion for Nero.

Four years passed before Nero decided he must finally be rid of his mother. It is unknown why Nero chose to act at this time, but Tacitus records that the emperor was simply tired of having her around.¹³ The absence of the praetorians in the event is significant.¹⁴ From the earliest stages of the plan, it is clear that the guard was not considered as the agent for the murder, though by this time, executions of a political nature, including members of the imperial family, had long been one of its functions.¹⁵ Instead, the scheme originated with Anicetus, the freedman in charge of the fleet at Misenum. When Nero was young, Anicetus had been his tutor and Tacitus records that he had great hatred for Agrippina. The fact that he had been able to attain the command of the fleet shows that he also had ambition.¹⁶ The use of the fleet, then, was the result of its

¹³ Tacitus, *Annals* 14.3.1: *postremo, ubicumque haberetur, praegravem ratus interficere constituit*. Cf. Barrett (1996), 156. The sources record two ostensible reasons for the murder: Poppaea wished it, and the negative reaction to the rumour of incest between mother and son. Cf. Tacitus, *Annals* 14.1.1; 2.1; Suetonius, *Nero* 28.2.

¹⁴ It is not clear what Durry (1938), 279 means when he writes: "Surtout ils [les prétoriens] collaborent activement à l'assassinat d'Agrippine."

¹⁵ For example, see below, "The Guard as a Specialized Military Unit", 146-147.

¹⁶ The assignment of the command of the fleet at Misenum to a freedman is unique to the reigns of Claudius and Nero in the imperial period, and is a result of the promotion of favourites to the position; cf. Brunt (1983), 59.

commander having the pivotal role in the murder, since Anicetus would want to use men he could personally trust, and who were bound to follow his orders.¹⁷

The details of the murder as recorded in Tacitus are well known.¹⁸ The initial failure of Anicetus' plan resulted in Nero summoning Burrus and Seneca to his room.¹⁹ He apparently feared retaliation from his mother.²⁰ The advisors had no response initially; when Seneca finally asked whether guard members could be sent, Burrus refused.²¹ Instead, he insisted that Anicetus finish what he

¹⁷ Barrett (1996), 184 argues that Nero was forced to rely upon the fleet because he felt that he could not trust the praetorians while Burrus was in command. Yet Burrus continued as praetorian prefect without incident until his death in AD 62, despite the fact that Nero could have replaced him at any time. The use of the fleet here seems to stem rather from the involvement of its commander as the one who devised the plan to murder Agrippina. Whatever unit Anicetus had been commanding would have provided the manpower for the deed, though it is probably the case that the fleet had less of an attachment to Agrippina than the guard may have had. The sailors were never used as a security force for the emperor; cf. Brunt (1983), 59. Contra Barrett (1996), 184. After the murder, in fact, Anicetus returned to his previous obscurity until confessing, at Nero's command, to a false charge of adultery with Octavia in order to provide a motive for her removal. He was exiled to Sardinia in AD 62. Cf. Tacitus, *Annals* 14.62.2-4; Suetonius, *Nero* 35.2.

¹⁸ Tacitus, *Annals* 14.3-9.1; see also Dio 61.12.2-14.1; Suetonius, *Nero* 34.

¹⁹ Whether this meeting actually took place, or how the details came to be known if it did, is not clear. It seems that the two men were not cognizant of Anicetus' plan since they were not waiting with the emperor for word of the outcome. They were obviously in Baiae, however, and there must also have been guard members present. Cf. Barrett (1996), 189; 299, note 20. Dio (61.12.1) involves Seneca in the planning of the deed, but see the criticisms of Seita (1979), 450-53.

²⁰ Tacitus, *Annals* 14.7.2: *tum pavore exanimis et iam iamque adfore obtestans vindictae properam, sive servitia armaret vel militem accenderet, sive ad senatum et populum pervaderet, naufragium et vulnus et interfectos amicos obiciendo*. If Nero had been concerned about the loyalty of his officers, however, he had ample opportunity to replace them prior to the murder. Yet the fact that Nero was fearful that Agrippina might try to use the soldiers against him was enough to ensure her death.

²¹ The prefect was adamant that the praetorians could not be involved, because their loyalty to the imperial house and to the memory of Germanicus would not allow them to commit such a deed. Tacitus, *Annals* 14.7.3-4: *[Burrus] praetorianos toti Caesarum domui obstrictos memoresque Germanici nihil adversus progeniem eius atrox ausuros respondit*. See also Dio 61.13.5. Yet if Burrus had been ready to make use of his men, it is certain that he could have found someone among those praetorians with the emperor at Baiae who would be willing to carry out the order to kill

had started. The fleet commander was quick to agree, since he realized that such action was politically expedient if he was to survive. He took with him two officers of the fleet whom he could trust. The crowd which had gathered to celebrate Agrippina's escape from drowning was dispersed by armed troops, probably those guard members who were with Nero at Baiae, and the murder was accomplished without difficulty.²²

There is no indication in the sources of the praetorians' initial response to the news that Agrippina was dead. If there was any discomfort among members of the guard over the murder, the reality of the situation soon prevailed. The official version – that Nero had escaped an assassin sent by his mother – was accepted without hesitation.²³ The day after the murder, the guard demonstrated its loyalty to the emperor in a display arranged by Burrus that was designed to assuage Nero's fear.²⁴ According to Dio, the emperor also granted the praetorians a donative after Agrippina's death, though the author's

Agrippina. It should be remembered that we only have Tacitus' account of what the prefect was alleged to have responded to Nero as evidence for the attitude of the praetorians.

²² Tacitus, *Annals* 14.8.2-5.

²³ Barrett (1996), 190: "Their loyalty to Agrippina was clearly tempered by a practical realism." The official account was repeated in a letter to the senate in which Nero also claimed that his mother wanted to be co-ruler with him, symbolized by having the oath of allegiance sworn to her separately, rather than being included with the imperial household. Cf. Tacitus, *Annals* 14.11.1: *quod consortium imperii iuraturasque in feminae verba praetorias cohortes idemque dedecus senatus et populi speravisset*.

²⁴ Tacitus, *Annals* 14.10.2: *atque eum auctore Burro prima centurionum tribunorumque adulatio ad spem firmavit, prensantium manum gratantiumque, quod discrimen improvisum et matris facinus evasisset*. As Griffin (1976), 77 notes, "Burrus limited himself to reconciling the praetorians to the murder. . . ." McDermott (1949), 252, however, attributes this action to Seneca.

explanation for it – that they might expect more crimes to be committed – is not very plausible.²⁵ If a donative was given at all, it is more probable that Nero was acknowledging the importance of the praetorians to his rule and ensuring their continued support.²⁶ Both emperor and guard emerged from the circumstances of Agrippina's death with a clear and sensible understanding about their relationship.

The praetorians are absent from our sources for the next few years of Nero's reign, though as we have noted with previous emperors, their various duties would have continued without interruption. It is simply the fact that nothing of significance occurred, at least as far as the sources were concerned, that explains the silence.²⁷ We do have details concerning the prefects, however. Burrus remained in office until his death in AD 62. Although most of the ancient sources record that he was poisoned, Tacitus admits the possibility of a natural death.²⁸ To replace him, Nero chose Lucius Faenius Rufus and Gaius Ofonius

²⁵ Dio 61.14.3: καὶ τοῖς τε δορυφόροις ἀργύριον ἔδωκεν, ἵνα δῆλον ὅτι πολλὰ τοιαῦτα γίνεσθαι εὐχωνται. There is no mention of this donative in the other sources.

²⁶ The number of donatives given by Nero before AD 59 were not that numerous, but the claim which was made by Nero after Agrippina's death – that she had opposed donatives to the soldiers – is unfounded. The explanation lies rather in the dearth of occasions on which it would have been suitable for donatives to have been given.

²⁷ There is one incident in which they may have taken part: the control of those who were protesting the execution of all of the urban prefect's household slaves after his murder by one among their number. Cf. Tacitus, *Annals* 14.45.2. It is likely that the praetorians were used in this instance rather than the urban cohorts. They may have reacted violently to any display of sympathy by the crowd, since it had been their commander that had been killed. See Yavetz (1969), 29-30; Grant (1974), 166.

²⁸ Tacitus, *Annals* 14.51.1-3 (with Koestermann (1965), vol. 4, 122); Suetonius, *Nero* 35.5; Dio 62.13.3. The reason given by Dio for the murder was the prefect's opposition to Nero divorcing Octavia to marry Poppaea. McDermott (1949), 253, in support of the story of murder, points to

Tigellinus. Rufus had been prefect of the grain supply since AD 55, an appointment that was associated with Agrippina's successful defense in that year.²⁹ He was popular with both the citizens and the praetorians, but his promotion to the office of praetorian prefect is curious, given his previous association with Agrippina.³⁰ Nero no doubt had taken the attitude of the guard into consideration in making his choice, perhaps even soliciting the opinions of the officers, but the reliance on Rufus may have been simply that he could act as a moderating influence on his colleague, Tigellinus.³¹ It is conceivable that, at the time when Burrus and Seneca were losing their influence with the emperor, that of Rufus and Tigellinus was increasing. The evidence suggests that Nero became more reliant upon Tigellinus when he became prefect of the *vigiles*, probably in

the words used by Tacitus (*infausta dona*) when discussing the grant of Burrus' estate (as well as that of Rubellius Plautus) to Octavia: "These properties would have been *infausta* only if they had belonged to men who had suffered some unnatural misfortune."

²⁹ Rufus was one of those rewarded after Agrippina had defended herself against a charge of inciting Rubellius Plautus to rebellion. See below, "The Guard in Civil Administration", 218-219. For Rufus' career, see Demougin (1992), #577. Cf. also Eck (1993), 70; Rudich (1993), 19; Griffin (1984), 79; Koestermann (1965), vol. 3, 272.

³⁰ Tacitus, *Annals* 14.51.3: *prospera populi et militum fama Rufus*. His popularity may have been the result of the diligence with which he had carried out his duties when in charge of the grain supply, if a reference to Faenian granaries (CIL 6.37796) belongs to him.

³¹ Tacitus, *Annals* 14.51.3. For Tigellinus' background, see Demougin (1993), #651. Griffin (1976), 90 points out that Nero could have become acquainted with Tigellinus during Claudius' reign when the future prefect possibly was involved with raising race-horses. Cf. also Barrett (1996), 86. The suggestion has been made that Tigellinus was behind not only the death of Burrus but also that of Annaeus Serenus, who had been prefect of the *vigiles* before him. See Waltz (1909), 384, note 1.

AD 59, and that, after the death of Burrus, Tigellinus had even greater influence on the emperor.³²

The appointment of two prefects at this time is very interesting, since it had been some time since the position had been shared.³³ The decision may betray a concern over how the appointment of Tigellinus to such a powerful post would be received in Rome, especially by the guard, or Nero's own lack of confidence in Tigellinus' ability to be able to control the soldiers. There certainly was no mutual respect between the two prefects, and in fact, Tacitus reports that Tigellinus immediately set about to undermine Rufus' position.³⁴ The prominence of Tigellinus as a close companion of the emperor and his domination of the office of prefect no doubt contributed to the alienation of Rufus, and this disaffection must have been noticed by the officers of the guard, if not by the rank and file. It undoubtedly helped to draw Rufus into the Pisonian conspiracy against Nero in AD 65.³⁵

³² Griffin (1976), 447-8. The date of his appointment as prefect of the *vigiles* is uncertain. Rudich (1993), 64 argues that it could have been "at Agrippina's request."

³³ Gillis (1963), 22, note 22 errs when he refers to "the disruptive method" of appointing two prefects rather than one. The prefecture initially had been established as a shared post by Augustus, and Nero simply was returning to this system. Cf. Koestermann (1965), vol. 4, 123 (on Tacitus, *Annals* 14.51.2).

³⁴ Tacitus, *Annals* 14.57.1; see also Dio 62.13.3. In the sources, we hear of Tigellinus being involved in the persecution of Octavia (AD 62), and of an elaborate banquet held by the prefect for Nero's enjoyment (AD 64), but there is no mention of Rufus. See Tacitus, *Annals* 14.60.5; 64.1; 15.37; Suetonius, *Nero* 35.2; Dio 62.15.1-6.

³⁵ Koestermann (1965), vol. 4, 137 (on Tacitus, *Annals* 14.57.1); Henderson (1903), 261. Tacitus' account of the event is the most comprehensive and reliable. For a summary, see Rudich (1993), 122; for criticism, see Baldwin (1967), 437-8.

The involvement of the praetorians in a conspiracy against the man whom they had sworn to protect reveals the change in attitude towards the princeps that had been developing in the years since the death of Agrippina. As Nero's behaviour became more eccentric, the soldiers grew less tolerant of his conduct, and some of them were drawn to conspire against him in spite of their oaths of loyalty. Once again, it was primarily the officers of the guard, in concert with senators and *equites*, who were at the forefront.³⁶ The plot attracted most of the tribunes, apparently united by their personal dislike of the emperor, although problems with pay also may have played a role in their participation.³⁷ The extent of the involvement of the rank and file is not recorded in the sources but, as had been the case with the conspiracy against Caligula, there was a need for the participation of at least a few of the soldiers if the plan was to succeed. It is likely that the average recruit had no animosity towards the emperor, though some may have been influenced by the prejudices of their commanders.

³⁶ The focus of the conspiracy was the replacement of Nero by Gaius Calpurnius Piso. The choice of someone who was not a member of the Julio-Claudian family may indicate that the impetus came not from those guard members who were involved but from elsewhere among the conspirators. In fact, it is recorded that the praetorians were not happy with the selection of Piso. Tacitus reports a rumour that the officers would replace him with Seneca soon after he had taken power. Cf. *Annals* 15.65.1.

³⁷ *Hatred of Nero*: Tacitus, *Annals* 15.67.2-3 (especially 67.2 where he quotes what Subrius Flavus said to Nero); 68.1; see also Dio 62.24.2; Suetonius, *Nero* 36.2. Cf. Warmington (1969), 137. *Pay*: Suetonius (*Nero* 32.1) notes the problem which was facing Nero: *destitutus atque ita iam exhaustus et egens ut stipendia quoque militum et commoda veteranorum protrahi ac differri necesse est*. It is of note, however, that the conspiracy did not involve any of the military outside Rome; cf. Griffin (1984), 166.

It was the inclusion of the prefect Rufus, however, that separated this conspiracy from that against Caligula; his involvement marked the first time that a prefect is known to have actively taken part in a plot against the emperor. As a result, his commitment was thought to augur success, though his actions in the affair were to prove disastrous.³⁸ His participation presumably indicated to those involved that he brought with him the backing of the entire guard, though in reality, it could not guarantee anything.³⁹ In the end, delays in putting the plan into action resulted in the betrayal of the conspiracy.⁴⁰ Nero was frightened enough to increase his guard and to post soldiers at every route into the city, both by land and by water.⁴¹ He clearly did not yet know how widespread the conspiracy was among his officers, and he used them to convey messages to those accused of complicity, apparently unaware of the guilt of the men he sent.⁴²

³⁸ Koestermann (1965), vol. 4, 271 (on Tacitus, *Annals* 15.50.3): "The praetorian prefect Faenius Rufus, in whom the conspirators had put their greatest hopes, proved himself later to be the greatest failure in the affair."

³⁹ Tacitus, *Annals* 15.59.1.

⁴⁰ The chronology of the events is not entirely clear, but in the initial stages, everyone seemed unwilling or unable to act, even after having gained assurances from Rufus that they had his support. The first disclosure of the plot came from a member of the fleet at Misenum, Volusius Proculus, who had been approached to carry out the plan because of the delays. His report to Nero forced the hand of the conspirators, who were then betrayed by one of their freedmen. See Tacitus, *Annals* 15.49.2; 50.4; 51.1-4; 54-56; 57.1-2. Cf also Dio 62.27.3.

⁴¹ It is not clear where these extra troops came from; Tacitus simply mentions that there were Germans among them. Tacitus, *Annals* 15.58.1-2: *volitabantque per fora, per domos, rura quoque et proxima municipiorum pedites equitesque, permixti Germanis, quibus fidebat princeps quasi externis*. Koestermann (1965), vol. 4, 291, following Furneaux (1896), vol. 2, 394, argues that the *pedites equitesque* of the passage are praetorians.

⁴² See below, "The Guard as a Specialized Military Unit", 171. He sent new recruits, however, to issue the order of death to Piso, being unwilling to rely upon any of those who might be favouring the consul; cf. Tacitus, *Annals* 15.59.4-5.

The ability of those officers eventually implicated to escape detection for so long, especially Faenius Rufus himself, resulted from a willingness to carry out the emperor's order to investigate their fellow conspirators (and others accused with them) and thus deflect attention away from themselves.⁴³

In the end, it was their enthusiastic interrogation that brought about the downfall of many of the officers, for they were betrayed by those being questioned. Among their number was Rufus himself, as well Flavius and Sulpicius Asper.⁴⁴ Nero must have been astounded to discover how widespread the conspiracy was among the upper ranks of the praetorians. Rudich suggests that this may account for him using triple bonds during their trials.⁴⁵ According to Tacitus, the soldiers met their deaths with dignity. Rufus alone is singled out for being cowardly.⁴⁶ Not all the officers were killed, however. Four were demoted, though their level of involvement in the plot is uncertain.⁴⁷ Among

⁴³ It is not clear whether this interrogation included torture of their colleagues, which would cast a more malevolent light on those officers involved. Rufus himself is depicted as taking part in investigations carried out by Nero and Tigellinus and, in one instance, Subrius Flavus wanted to murder the emperor during the procedure but was stopped by the prefect, who obviously still had firm control over his men. Cf. Tacitus, *Annals* 15.58.3-4; Rudich (1993), 117.

⁴⁴ Tacitus, *Annals* 15.66.1. It is interesting that it was not a member of the guard who betrayed Rufus, but Scaevinus, whose actions were what had brought about the initial exposure of the plot.

⁴⁵ Rudich (1993), 119; 290.

⁴⁶ Tacitus, *Annals* 15.67-68.1.

⁴⁷ Tacitus, *Annals* 15.71.3. Koestermann (1965), vol. 4, 322 notes that the four who were demoted were not listed in 50.3 as being involved in the plot. It may have been that Nero was uncertain whom he could trust, and preferred to remove any officers that had the least suspicion attached to them.

those who suffered for alleged complicity was Rufrius Crispinus, the former praetorian prefect, who was exiled to Sardinia, his only crime being that Nero hated him.⁴⁸

It is remarkable that the conspiracy failed, given the involvement of so many high-ranking members of the guard. The evidence points to at least seven of the twelve praetorian tribunes somehow being connected to the plot, acknowledging that the four who were demoted were associated in some way with those who were found guilty.⁴⁹ The entire plan seems to have collapsed because of the unwillingness of those involved, in particular the praetorian officers and the prefect, to take decisive action.⁵⁰ For the majority of the praetorians, however, the Pisonian conspiracy proved to be a boon. They stood to gain no matter what the outcome. If the plot had succeeded, there can be no doubt that the soldiers would have been enticed by a large donative to pledge allegiance to a new emperor. On the other hand, when it failed, Nero saw to it that they were well rewarded for not having deserted him. After the punishment of the conspirators had been completed, he gave the praetorians a donative of

⁴⁸ Tacitus, *Annals* 15.71.4.

⁴⁹ The seven tribunes were: Pompeius (praenomen and cognomen unknown); Cornelius Martialis; Flavius Nepos; Statius Domitius (all of whom were demoted); Gavius Silvanus; Statius Proxumus (both of whom committed suicide); and Subrius Flavus (who was murdered). Cf. Demougin (1992), 480. We know of only two who seem not to have been incriminated: Veianius Niger and Gerellanus; cf. Tacitus, *Annals* 15.67.4; 69.1.

⁵⁰ Cf. Koestermann (1965), vol. 4, 322, who argues that it was the "incompetence and inactivity" of Faenius Rufus that accounts for the failure of the conspiracy; also 311 (on Tacitus, *Annals* 15.66.1). See also Rudich (1993), 118.

two thousand sesterces, and granted them free grain.⁵¹ These gifts signified his recognition that, even though the plot had primarily involved officers who had since been removed from their positions, he still needed to acknowledge the loyalty of the majority of the guard in the affair, and ensure their continued support. The grant of grain seems to have been intended not just for this one occasion but as a permanent concession, given Tacitus' *quo ante ex modo annonae utebantur*.⁵² It is of note that only members of the guard were given the donative, and there is no mention in the sources of any grant to the rest of the army, nor a *congiarium* for the people as a whole.⁵³

In addition to these grants to the soldiers, Nero also rewarded individuals for their loyalty, among them Tigellinus. There is no information about him during the conspiracy except after its exposure.⁵⁴ The rewards that he received were substantial for a praetorian prefect: an honourary triumph, and statues in

⁵¹ Tacitus, *Annals* 15.72.1; cf. Dio 62.27.4; Suetonius, *Nero* 10.1. See above, note 12. A coin issued in the years AD 66–68, depicting the emperor addressing the praetorians, indicates that their significance to the rule was never forgotten. See figure 7.

⁵² It has been argued that the legions had had free grain rations from the time of Augustus, and it was only now that the praetorians were given the same privilege. Cf. Furneaux (1896), vol. 2, 410–11. He based his claim on Tacitus, *Annals* 1.17.4. His argument is accepted by Koestermann (1965), vol. 4, 325, and Watson (1969), 110. Contra Durry (1938), 269; Brunt (1950), 53; Bradley (1978), 76–7. The praetorians apparently drew their rations individually, presumably in Rome, which may have driven the price up. Cf. Roth (1994), 362, note 128; Brunt (1950), 53, note 21, who accounts for the increased rate of pay for the guard as compensation to offset the higher cost of purchasing food in the capital.

⁵³ Cf. Koestermann (1965), vol. 4, 325. Griffin (1984), 168 refers to Nero “buying the loyalty of the Guard.”

⁵⁴ For example, Tacitus, *Annals* 15.58.3 where Tigellinus is one of those involved in the interrogation of alleged conspirators. See also Dio 62.28.4 where he is reported to have taken bribes to save lives.

the palace and the forum.⁵⁵ Such excessive honours must indicate a significant role in the detection of the plot, something which the sources have omitted to report. Also honoured at this time was Gaius Nymphidius Sabinus, who was awarded an honorary consulship. He was also chosen to be Tigellinus' new colleague. Tacitus provides some information about Sabinus at this point, his first appearance in the *Annals*.⁵⁶ Nothing is known about his early career, nor about his role in the exposure of the conspiracy.⁵⁷ It must have been significant, given his reward: "... the merit of C. Nymphidius Sabinus in the outcome of the affair remains unclear ... in light of [his] low social origin the prize of consular decorations bestowed upon him certainly seems exorbitant, so that, judging by what our sources unanimously say concerning his character and behaviour, the job he performed must have been nothing short of dirty."⁵⁸ A lacuna in the text of Tacitus has resulted in the omission of any record of Sabinus' appointment as praetorian prefect, but it is possible that he previously had been associated in some way with the cohorts in the city. He obviously was involved in the aftermath of the plot in a manner which had attracted the attention of the

⁵⁵ Tacitus, *Annals* 15.72.1; cf. also Suetonius, *Nero* 15.2; Dio 62.27.4. According to Suetonius (*Otho* 1.3), it was a very rare honour for a statue on the Palatine to be granted to an individual outside the imperial family. The last praetorian prefect to have been granted an honorary statue was Sejanus; cf. below, "The Guard in Civil Administration", 183.

⁵⁶ Tacitus, *Annals* 15.72.2.

⁵⁷ Koestermann (1965), vol. 4, 327 argues for Sabinus earlier to have been in Pannonia, based on a rather fragmentary inscription (CIL 3.4264 = ILS 1322). See also Syme (1939), 247; Chilver (1979), 50; Demougin (1992), #640.

⁵⁸ Rudich (1993), 130.

emperor. Yet Sabinus was to prove a major element in the eventual downfall of Nero.

Throughout the rest of the reign, the guard continued to perform the same duties as it had before, though these tasks sometimes went beyond what had become routine.⁵⁹ For example, in addition to acting as security at the games and theatre, the praetorians now provided encouragement to Nero when he was performing on stage.⁶⁰ The guard also continued to be employed in the surveillance and execution of those who were determined to be a threat.⁶¹ Even after the exposure of the Pisonian conspiracy, praetorians were still trusted to carry out such duties.⁶² The role of the prefects in these cases is often not recorded, and it is difficult to know the level of their participation, though we are told that Tigellinus was involved in at least one instance, that of Petronius.⁶³

⁵⁹ A good illustration is provided by the role that the praetorians played in the intimidation of senators attending the meeting at which Nero wished to secure the condemnation of Thræsea Paetus; cf. Tacitus, *Annals* 16.27.1. Intimidation was also the objective for the display of the guard put on when Tiridates entered Rome in AD 66; cf. Dio 63.4.2-3; see also Suetonius, *Nero* 13.1. It is unlikely that the soldiers were there only as a police force, as claimed by Bradley (1978), 90.

⁶⁰ See below, "The Guard in Civil Administration", 199-200. In AD 55, Nero had experimented with removing the guard from the games, but it was not long before they were back; cf. Tacitus, *Annals* 13.24.1; 25.1.

⁶¹ See below, "The Guard as a Specialized Military Unit", 173.

⁶² The guard was probably used for the arrest and execution of many of those involved in the Vinician conspiracy of AD 66. Cf. Suetonius, *Nero* 36.1. As Bradley (1978), 220-1 notes, this passage is the only literary evidence for the conspiracy, though there is an entry in the *Acta Fratrum Arvalium* (= Smallwood [1967], 26), part of which reads *ob detecta nefariorum consilia*; cf. also Griffin (1984), 177-179. Further evidence for the discovery of a plot may come from coins issued at this time which bear the same legend (JUPPITER CUSTOS) as those struck after the exposure of the Pisonian conspiracy, when they were used for the donative paid to the guard. Cf. Zehnacker (1987), 333.

⁶³ Tacitus, *Annals* 16.18.3.

Late in AD 66, Nero went to Greece. It is not known how many members of the guard went with him, but among their number was Tigellinus. The emperor left one of his freedmen, Helius, in charge in Rome. Nymphidius Sabinus also remained behind, in command of the greater part of the praetorians who stayed in the city.⁶⁴ But all was not well in Rome with the emperor away, and Nero finally was convinced to return because of fears that another conspiracy was being planned against him. It is noteworthy that this warning came from Helius and not from Sabinus. Though the division of responsibility in Rome is not clear in the sources, it is obvious from later events that Sabinus had military control of the capital.⁶⁵ After all, he was the sole prefect in Rome with command over the majority of the guard, and there was virtually no one who could challenge him with the emperor away. Nero reluctantly returned to the capital, making a grand entry and accompanied by members of the guard.⁶⁶ Such a extravagant display was intended, no doubt, to remind those in Rome that he was still in control, and that he still had the support of the praetorians behind him. Within a short time, however, Nero found himself facing a revolt by the governor of Gaul, Gaius Julius Vindex, and then came the rumour that

⁶⁴ Dio 63.12.1. It is not clear exactly what position Helius held, but it appears he had more power in Rome than the consuls or urban prefect. That he had been given the power of death over those in the city as Dio records is in all probability an exaggeration.

⁶⁵ Rudich (1993), 234.

⁶⁶ Dio 63.20.4.

Servius Sulpicius Galba, the governor of Spain, had been acclaimed as emperor by his troops. Completely overwhelmed by these events, Nero turned to his guard for support. But Sabinus had already undermined the relationship between the soldiers and the emperor while the latter was in Greece to such a degree that it was relatively easy to convince the praetorians to abandon Nero.⁶⁷ This marks the first time that the rank and file of the guard as a whole had forsworn their oaths and deserted an emperor, but it appears to have been made possible only because Nero's authority had been substantially diminished while he was absent. By the time that the emperor returned, it is clear that the guard had become extremely dissatisfied with him, and that he needed to reassert his authority over them. If he had done so when he had first come back, he undoubtedly could have regained control in Rome, since the praetorians had in the past chosen to support the status quo rather than risk their privileged position. After all, Galba was still in his province, and largely an unknown quantity for those troops in the city. All they had were the reassurances of Sabinus. But Nero was either unwilling or unable to negotiate with his household troops and, as a result, they were left with only the word of their

⁶⁷ There is scant mention in our sources of Tigellinus after Nero's return from Greece. We have no knowledge of the role he played (if any) in the events which brought about the fall of the emperor. His influence with the guard in the latter part of the reign was overshadowed by that of Sabinus; the ease with which this happened can be explained by Tigellinus' absence from Rome when he accompanied Nero to Greece. Despite calls for retribution against him while Galba was emperor, Tigellinus was only put to death by Otho after continued demands for his execution. Cf. Plutarch, *Galba* 17; *Otho* 2.1-2; Suetonius, *Galba* 15 2; Dio 63.3.3.

prefect that the emperor had deserted them rather than the reverse, which made their decision much easier.⁶⁸

Nero now made plans to flee from Rome, and sent men to prepare the fleet at Ostia. Escape by sea offered the only hope, given his uncertainty about the loyalty of the legions in the north, and it is possible that he hoped to reach Egypt where he could conceivably mount a counterattack against Galba. The decision to go to the fleet, therefore, should not be seen as a preference for this unit over any other, but as the only practical solution. Nero tried in vain to convince tribunes and centurions of the guard to accompany him.⁶⁹ Later that same night, he awoke to find that the cohort usually in attendance at the palace had deserted him, and so he decided to make his way out of the city.⁷⁰ In his flight, he passed by the *Castra Praetoria* and reportedly overheard the shouts of the guard acclaiming Galba as emperor in his place.⁷¹ Had Nero made an

⁶⁸ To facilitate the defection, Sabinus also promised the guard a large donative (in Galba's name) if they would acknowledge Galba as emperor. See Plutarch, *Galba* 2.2; cf. Suetonius, *Galba* 16.1; Tacitus, *Histories* 1.5.1; Josephus, *BJ* 4.492-3. The amount of this grant is recorded to have been 7500 denarii per praetorian, double that given by Claudius and Nero at their accessions. The large donative may have been offered not only to expedite the declaration of the praetorians for Galba, but also to assuage any guilt that they may have felt at betraying Nero. Cf. Daly (1975), 86, note 50.

⁶⁹ Suetonius, *Nero* 47.1. Bradley (1978), 273 notes that "appeal to the lower ranking officers implies that the *praefecti* had already broken their allegiance to Nero."

⁷⁰ Dio 63.27.2-3; Suetonius, *Nero* 47.3. Although Dio records that it was the senate who withdrew the guard from Nero, this would be most unusual since they had no authority to do so. The epitomators are not clear at this point about the chronology of events but the cooperation between the senate and the guard would be unprecedented and, given the subsequent influence of the prefect Sabinus, seems highly unlikely.

⁷¹ Suetonius, *Nero* 48.2; cf. Plutarch, *Galba* 7.2.

appearance at the camp at this time, he could have saved his empire and his life, since the praetorians undoubtedly would have wavered had they been confronted by the man to whom they had sworn allegiance.⁷² But once the soldiers had declared for Galba, it was a simple matter for the senate to ratify the decision, and for Nero to be declared a public enemy.⁷³ There is a rather poignant story in Suetonius that, on the way out of Rome, Nero received one last salute from a retired praetorian who recognized him when his face was exposed for a brief moment.⁷⁴ No member of the guard attended his death, except for a centurion who came in as if to help him, but was too late.⁷⁵

The desertion of Nero by the praetorians was facilitated in the end by the influence which Sabinus had with his men, and by the promise of a substantial donative. It is clear that the prefect had used the opportunity while Nero was in Greece to ingratiate himself with the soldiers. Committed to the cause, he was instrumental in convincing the praetorians to abandon the emperor, and it is this resolution that constitutes the major difference between the final betrayal of Nero by the guard and the previous incidents with Agrippina and Piso. The ease with which the betrayal was accomplished indicates the guard's level of annoyance

⁷² Griffin (1984), 186. She blames Nero's cowardice for his demise. Cf. also the remark in Tacitus (*Histories* 1.89.2) that Nero was driven out more by messages and rumours than by arms.

⁷³ Cf. Furneaux (1896), vol. 2, 483; Griffin (1984), 185; Brunt (1959), 542.

⁷⁴ Suetonius, *Nero* 48.2; cf. also Dio 63.28.1.

⁷⁵ Suetonius, *Nero* 49.4. Cf. also Dio 63.29.1.

with Nero, as well as the thoroughness of the undermining of the emperor's position by Sabinus.⁷⁶ It was only later when they realized that the donative would not be paid that the praetorians seem to have become aware of the way in which they had been deceived.⁷⁷ But, as long as Galba was not in Rome, Sabinus clearly was in charge in the city, with the senate accepting and even encouraging his position, and the guard being devoted to him.⁷⁸ When Sabinus received word that Galba had appointed Cornelius Laco to be prefect, however, his response was to attempt to subvert the new emperor's authority.⁷⁹ He first tried to force Galba to return to Rome by reporting chaos in the capital and elsewhere, but to no avail.⁸⁰ Therefore, he tried a different approach. He convinced some of his followers that he should be proclaimed emperor in the *Castra Praetoria* without delay, declaring that he was the illegitimate son of Caligula and

⁷⁶ Warmington (1969), 162 remarks that "[Sabinus'] role seems to have been underestimated in the sources, as if it was undesirable to admit the importance played in the fall of Nero by such a deplorable person, who was subsequently disloyal to Galba as well." Cf. also Rudich (1993), 235.

⁷⁷ Tacitus, *Histories* 1.5.1; Suetonius, *Galba* 16.1; Dio 64.3.3; Plutarch, *Galba* 2.3; 18.2. Although the guard probably did not anticipate the huge amount promised by the prefect, the expectation would have been that some payment would be forthcoming.

⁷⁸ Plutarch, *Galba* 8.1-5. Rudich (1993), 236 calls Sabinus the "virtual dictator of the city."

⁷⁹ Suetonius, *Galba* 14.2; Plutarch, *Galba* 13.1-2. Syme (1988), 115 refers to Laco as "a mere legal officer attached to the governor", making for a most unusual appointment to prefect, given his lack of experience. It is not entirely clear from the sources whether Laco was to be sole prefect or to share in the command with Sabinus; it is of note that the new appointee remained sole prefect after Sabinus' death.

⁸⁰ Plutarch, *Galba* 13.3. It certainly would not have helped his case for Sabinus to point to unrest in the city, since he himself ultimately seems to have been responsible for the military in Rome.

therefore had the right to rule.⁸¹ The fact that his claim was based on an affinity with the Julio-Claudians emphasizes the influence that the imperial house still held in this struggle for power. The plan was foiled, however, by one of the tribunes, Antonius Honoratus, who made an impassioned plea to his cohort not to abandon Galba.⁸² His soldiers in turn convinced their fellow praetorians to join them. When Sabinus arrived at the camp intending to persuade them of his cause, he found that the guard had reasserted its support for Galba, and despite an attempt to maintain solidarity with his men, he was murdered.⁸³

⁸¹ Plutarch, *Galba* 9. Rudich (1993), 235 offers the theory that, with such notable persons as the consul-designate Cingonius Varro supporting him, Sabinus was being used to get rid of Galba, only to be removed himself later. Cf. also Manfre (1941), 118-120.

⁸² Greenhalgh (1975), 21 refers to Honoratus as a “secret agent”, but there is no evidence to suggest that the tribune had been working covertly on behalf of Galba.

⁸³ Plutarch, *Galba* 13.4-14.6; Suetonius, *Galba* 11.1 where there is also a reference to a plot against the new emperor involving Sabinus, Fonteius Capito (legate of Lower Germany) and Clodius Macer (legate of III Augusta in Africa); this is most likely an conflation of individual actions against Galba.

VII. Postscript

The involvement of the guard in the events of the so-called “year of the four emperors” was significant, though overshadowed by the role played by the legions. The choice of Galba as emperor had been decided by the troops in the field, but any ruler needed the support of the praetorians as well. After all, they had become so integrated into the civil administration of the capital and the workings of the principate that to neglect them would bring about massive discord. The new emperor, however, did not seem to recognize their importance. The bitterness of the guard at being denied the donative promised by Sabinus, coupled with Galba’s cruel treatment of the soldiers on the march to Rome and the dismissal of several officers from the city cohorts, resulted in much disaffection among the soldiers.¹ As Murison notes, “[Galba’s] behaviour towards the Praetorians was utterly foolish: given the situation in 68-69, he was in no position to insist on discipline and at the same time to refuse to pay the promised donative.”²

It was because of these problems that Marcus Salvius Otho, former governor of Lusitania and now one of Galba’s confidants in Rome, was able to

¹ *Donative*: Tacitus, *Histories* 1.5; Plutarch, *Galba* 18.2. *March to Rome*: Dio 64.3.1-2; cf. Plutarch, *Galba* 15.3-4. *Dismissal*: Tacitus, *Histories* 1.20. Tacitus points out that these dismissals were greeted with suspicion since the remaining officers felt insecure about their positions as well. Lucius Antonius Naso, who had a remarkable career under Nero, was one of those who was let go; see below, “The Guard in Civil Administration”, 225-26.

² Murison (1993), 60.

ingratiate himself with the praetorians, in particular, with the officers.³ After being overlooked as Galba's designated successor in January of AD 69, Otho used his influence with the guard to convince them to switch allegiance to himself.⁴ Two members of the guard were bribed to spread dissent among the ranks about Galba's inability to rule, and to persuade the praetorians to support Otho. They met with little difficulty. Any disgrace that had been attached to the forswearing of their oaths had been eradicated. The guard now recognized that it indeed had a choice. On the appointed day, though the cohort guarding the palace remained loyal for the most part, Galba was unable to defend himself adequately against the praetorians and assorted legionaries that attacked him, and he was murdered in the Forum.⁵ His praetorian prefect, Laco, was also killed.⁶ In the end, it was Galba's inability or unwillingness to accept that he needed the support of the troops in the city, and that a donative, even of a small sum, had to be paid to the praetorians in order to establish this trust, which helped to bring him down.

The role that the guard had played in assuring Otho's succession demanded recognition, and Tacitus records that the new emperor acquiesced to

³ Tacitus, *Histories* 1.23-24. His courting of the guard began with the group of praetorians sent to escort Galba from Spain and continued once he was in Rome.

⁴ Tacitus, *Histories* 1.25-28.

⁵ *Cohort at the palace*: Tacitus, *Histories* 1.29; 38. *Galba's death*: Tacitus, *Histories* 1.40-41.

⁶ Tacitus, *Histories* 1.46.

the requests of the soldiers, including the right to appoint their own prefects, the first time the choice had been granted to them.⁷ The men selected were Licinius Proculus and Plotius Firmus.⁸ By allowing the guard this right, Otho presumably thought that he would provide a safeguard for himself, for the soldiers ought to be well disposed toward the commanders they had chosen, who, in turn, would answer to him. It also was under Otho that the praetorians saw active service in the field for the first time since the reign of Tiberius.⁹ They were sent to block the advance of the forces sent by Aulus Vitellius, the former governor of Lower Germany, who in early January had been proclaimed emperor by his troops. In the weeks that followed, the praetorians proved themselves capable of battle; service in the city had not blunted their field skills. Even after the defeat of most of Otho's forces, he continued to be encouraged by his praetorians to keep up the fight, not only because their position would be threatened by his loss, but also through affection for their emperor.¹⁰ After his

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Firmus earlier had been appointed prefect of the *vigiles* by Galba. Cf. Tacitus, *Histories* 1.46.1; Demougin (1993), #660. For Proculus, see Demougin (1993), #666. The praetorians also were allowed to choose the urban prefect; their preference was Flavius Sabinus, who had held the same position under Nero.

⁹ Tacitus, *Histories* 1.87.1; 1.89.2. They had last fought with Germanicus in AD 16, though the mock exercises held by Caligula in Germany had also involved the guard; cf. Suetonius, *Caligula* 45.1.

¹⁰ Tacitus, *Histories* 2.46.

suicide, in fact, his funeral was held by those members of the guard who had remained loyal.¹¹

Vitellius understandably was distrustful of the praetorians who had fought for Otho (and who were mainly the same men who had served under Nero and Galba) and decided to start afresh. The guard was cashiered and sixteen new cohorts were created, mainly from the legions.¹² By early August, however, the new emperor had been made aware of the proclamation of Vespasian in the east, and the praetorians again took part in the subsequent battles which ensued between the opposing parties. The Flavians had managed to locate several members of the guard who had been released by Vitellius and enlisted them with the promise of readmittance to the ranks of the praetorians in return for their assistance. By the middle of December, the capital itself had been attacked, with some of the heaviest fighting occurring in the area of the *Castra Praetoria* between those who were the former praetorians of Galba and Otho, now fighting for the Flavians, and those who had taken their position, fighting for Vitellius. As happened elsewhere in Italy, the Vitellian forces were defeated, though not without a strong fight.

¹¹ *Ibid* 2.49.

¹² Tacitus, *Histories* 2.67.1. As Wellesley (1975), 106 notes, "... by this measure Vitellius bound to himself a large body of totally devoted and desperate men who could be relied on to fight to the last for their emperor and their privileges."

When Vespasian came to power, the number of praetorian cohorts was reduced back to nine, but he did not dismiss all the men as Vitellius had done.¹³ Instead, the new emperor appointed his son to be sole prefect. This was the first time that the relationship between emperor and prefect had been strengthened through kinship, and it acknowledged the importance that the prefecture, and by extension the praetorians themselves, had in supporting the administration and keeping the emperor in power. Titus also was a military man, unlike the previous prefects, and would bring to the position the discipline and skill which was needed to manage a guard disheartened by recent events. Vespasian knew that Titus would be able to control the guard, and had no doubts about his loyalty. The upheavals of the previous year had not gone without notice by Nero's former general.

The importance of the guard to the imperial household, and to the civil administration of Rome, continued to manifest itself throughout the rest of its history. The organization of the praetorians remained much as it had been under the Julio-Claudians, until the dismissal of the entire unit by Severus in AD 193, and its replacement by men from the legions.¹⁴ Their responsibilities also must have continued as before, especially the role of providing assistance in the civil administration of the city. By the early part of the second century AD, the career

¹³ The number of cohorts is based on CIL 16.21 (ILS 1993). Cf. Durry (1938), 80.

¹⁴ Cf. Dio 75.1-2; Herodian 2.14.5. The number of cohorts was set at ten in the reign of Domitian; see Durry (1938), 80.

of the praetorian had become regularized within the military system, and guard members are found in the field, fighting alongside the emperor.¹⁵ But, after its experiences under the Julio-Claudians, the guard also was aware that they could have an impact on the political fortunes of the emperor, though this ability was not truly appreciated until the auctioning of the empire in AD 193.¹⁶ Of course, it was partly because of the dishonor of the auction that they were dismissed by Severus, and their replacements chosen from the northern legions. This change dramatically altered the composition of the guard, for no longer were Italians to dominate the ranks. Yet, it was only a century later, after Constantine's accession in AD 312, that the guard was disbanded permanently. The history of the praetorians had come to an end.

¹⁵ Durry (1938), 379.

¹⁶ For the details, see Birley (1988), 94-96; Durry (1938), 382-83.

Part 2: The Functions of the Praetorian Guard

The praetorian guard was used for many purposes other than simply guarding the emperor. These responsibilities fall into two broad categories: special military assignments, and civil administrative tasks. The duties evolved from the primary function of the praetorians as the imperial bodyguard and from the close relationship between the emperor and the guard; they were influenced as well by the way that the praetorian cohort had been employed in the late republic. As the presence of soldiers became more acceptable in Rome, the guard was able to be used in circumstances where previously there had been no organized response, or to supplement other services that did exist. It must be remembered that the imperial praetorian guard came into being in the early stages of the empire, and there was no formal plan in place to dictate how the body should develop and change as the principate evolved. By the end of the Julio-Claudian period, the guard had become entrenched in diverse aspects of the administration, and the role that it was to play in subsequent reigns had already been foreshadowed in their actions under the early emperors.

It is clear that the praetorians were not a static group throughout their early history. Nor is it the case, however, that the evolution of the unit was inherent in its character. The development of the guard from a group whose primary purpose was to oversee the protection of the emperor and his family into a force that had various functions in the state, some of which might be

considered objectionable, was a response to the requirements of a metamorphosing imperial system. The fact that the praetorians changed from what was essentially a benign unit to one that, only fifty years into their existence, was willing to murder the man whom they had sworn to protect, has more to do with the nature of the Roman state in the early first century AD than with the guard itself. It was in response to the political events of the times that the soldiers became drawn into intrigue, and on occasion were driven to forswear their oaths. The broadening scope of their duties not only provided them with additional responsibilities but also inserted them into the administration of the city in a way that made them visible and liable to be influenced.

An important consideration in the assignment of the guard to the sort of tasks discussed in the following pages was the need to keep such a large force in Rome occupied. This challenge became even more significant with the increase in the number of cohorts to twelve under Tiberius in AD 23. It is possible that the use of the praetorians in such a wide variety of duties was the most practical means to keep the soldiers occupied and not sitting idle in their camp. Not only was the guard kept busy but the citizens also benefitted from the more efficient administration of the city.

VIII. The Guard as a Specialized Military Unit

Unrest in Italy and the Empire

The use of the guard to protect the emperor and his family has been well documented, and is discussed in some detail above. Not only was there a permanent watch of praetorians at the palace, but they also accompanied the emperor whenever he travelled, either in Italy or abroad. There were also contingents of the guard assigned to members of the imperial family, though how many men this involved, and exactly who of the household were granted such a privilege, is not clear from the sources. The honour was given at the discretion of the emperor, as the case with Agrippina under Nero shows, but specific mention of the presence of the praetorians in such instances is infrequent.

In the rare cases where the praetorians accompanied members of the family other than the emperor in military operations, however, we are provided with some details. Under the Julio-Claudians, there are only two examples, both of which date to the early years of Tiberius' reign: the guard went with Drusus to Pannonia in AD 14 to quell a rebellion, and soldiers accompanied Germanicus to Germany in AD 16.¹ In both incidents, two cohorts of the guard were sent.² The

¹ *Drusus*: Tacitus, *Annals* 1.24.2; cf. Dio 57.4.3–4. For details of the chronology of the revolt, see Levick (1976), 72–3; Seager (1972), 60–1; Schmitt (1958), 378–383. *Germanicus*: Tacitus, *Annals* 2.16.3; 20.3. We know very little about the role of the guard in this expedition, other than that praetorians along with selected guard cavalry provided protection for Germanicus in battle.

² Dury (1938), 277 used these examples to argue that the usual number of cohorts accompanying members of the imperial family was two, but the number of men that would involve seems excessive, even if the effective of 500 as proposed by Dury is accepted. The fact that these are military operations dictated the presence of such a large contingent.

purpose of sending elite troops with Drusus was twofold: to provide protection for him and as a show of status, though there can be little doubt that the soldiers were also to keep an eye on his conduct with the legions. It is ironic that praetorians were sent north with Drusus, for one of the complaints of the army was the preferred status given to the cohorts from Rome, and Tacitus records that members of the guard were harassed by their legionary counterparts in hopes of provoking a confrontation.³ It may have been an acknowledgment of the potential for just such a dangerous conflict that led to the sending of the praetorians as a guard for Drusus in the first place. The gravity of the situation also may explain the presence of Sejanus. There is no reason for him to have accompanied Drusus as commander of the cohorts, for that responsibility would have been handled by the tribunes, but Tiberius may have sent the prefect of the guard along to provide additional support by a high-ranking officer, and to show how seriously he himself was taking the matter.⁴ According to Tacitus, Sejanus was to be Drusus' advisor (*rector iuveni*), which may have meant that he had explicit instructions from the emperor on what was to be conceded to the rebellious legions, especially in light of the fact that Drusus himself apparently

³ *Complaints*: Tacitus, *Annals* 1.17. The main complaint was the length of service and rate of pay of the legionaries in comparison with the guard. *Harassment*: Ibid, 1.27.1.

⁴ Levick (1976), 73 argues that Sejanus was needed to command the troops because of a delay in Drusus leaving Rome, but it is difficult to understand why the absence of Drusus made the presence of Sejanus imperative. The cohorts could have gone on ahead without Drusus, with the tribunes in charge of their men. Tacitus (*Annals* 1.24.2) does not associate Sejanus' appointment specifically with the mutiny.

had not been given definite instructions.⁵ It is possible that Tiberius had doubts about Drusus' ability to handle the problem; after all, he had not been involved in military matters prior to this assignment.⁶ The prefect's presence, then, can be explained by the need to have someone with experience accompany a commander whose appointment resulted more from his status as the son of the emperor than his skill as a negotiator. Yet, Sejanus is not mentioned again in the account of the events of the mutiny and it is not clear exactly what role he eventually played.⁷ The two cohorts of the guard that were sent had been strengthened beyond their regular effective and were reinforced by both praetorian cavalry and German bodyguards. These precautions proved to be necessary, for the mutineers among the legions in Pannonia were intent on making trouble and it was only an eclipse of the moon that prevented a confrontation.⁸ As punishment, Drusus had the ringleaders of the mutiny executed, some by praetorians.⁹

⁵ Tacitus, *Annals* 1.24.1: *nullis satis certis mandatis*. It may have been that this arrangement contributed to the later animosity between Drusus and Sejanus. Cf. Meise (1969), 70. Contra Levick (1976), 159. Hennig (1975), 19 thinks that Tacitus has overestimated the role of Sejanus, given Drusus' status and his age.

⁶ Levick (1976), 158 comments that "the trip to Pannonia in AD 14 is the first attested service abroad [for Drusus], and that was made without any grant of official powers."

⁷ Velleius Paterculus (*Histories* 2.125.5) names Quintus Iunius Blaesus, the legate of Pannonia, as the main advisor to the group from Rome. A further explanation for Sejanus' presence may lie, therefore, in the relationship between the legate and himself, for the prefect was Blaesus' nephew.

⁸ For example, the guard came to the rescue of Gnaeus Cornelius Lentulus who had been accosted by soldiers as he was leaving the camp; cf. Tacitus, *Annals* 1.27.2. Furneaux (1896), vol. 1, 215 argues that the praetorians were kept outside the camp except for a small contingent with Drusus, but their arrival to rescue Lentulus seems to suggest that they are within the walls.

⁹ Tacitus, *Annals* 1.30.1.

There were also occasions when the praetorians were used to quell disturbances without any member of the imperial family present. The reason for their involvement can be found in the character of the unit itself. Their presence on such missions can be viewed as representing the direct intervention of the princeps in Rome. Under the Julio-Claudians, there are three incidents when the praetorians were sent to areas in Italy to handle problems, and in each, the involvement of the guard was dictated by the failure of others to find a solution.

Sometime during the reign of Tiberius, praetorians intervened in an incident in the town of Pollentia in northern Italy. The citizens there were unwilling to allow the body of a chief centurion to be removed from the forum until the heirs promised to provide gladiatorial games.¹⁰ Tiberius sent two cohorts, one from the city, another from the area of the Cottian Alps to suppress the demonstration.¹¹ Although it is not stated expressly that the cohort from the city was praetorian, it most likely was the guard that was involved rather than the urban cohorts.¹² The praetorians would be better prepared to handle such incidents, given their training as a military unit. Suetonius adds that the entire

¹⁰ Suetonius, *Tiberius* 37.3.

¹¹ Since 14 BC, the area of the Alps near Segusio had been ruled by Cottius, a local chieftain. Augustus had provided a contingent of Roman troops, stationed at Segusio, for his use. It is probably these soldiers which are meant.

¹² Nippel (1995), 91. Seager (1972), 138, however, argues for it to be an urban cohort; cf. also Gaggero (1990), 360, note 5. Under the Julio-Claudians, however, there is no evidence of the urban cohorts being sent from the city to handle problems elsewhere.

undertaking was done secretly and it was only at the last moment that the real reason for the presence of the soldiers was revealed to the citizens.¹³ The need for concealment may also help to explain why it was the guard that was sent. The mobilization of the praetorians in a concerted action together with troops sent from the north indicates that the incident eliciting such a response must have represented a much greater threat than is revealed in our sources.¹⁴

Under Tiberius the guard was also called upon to prevent a slave insurrection led by one of its veterans, Titus Curtilius.¹⁵ In AD 24, this former guardsman was holding secret meetings in Brundisium and the surrounding area, and issuing pamphlets to incite the slaves there to revolt. The initial response against the rebellion came from a quaestor in the area, Cutius Lupus, who made use of the crews from patrol ships which happened to have docked there, but this effort was not enough. Tiberius quickly dispatched a tribune of the guard, Staius, with a force of praetorians, to capture Curtilius and bring him to Rome.¹⁶ Tacitus adds that there was great fear in the capital because of the large number of slaves there, and this may explain why the emperor's personal guard

¹³ *dissimulata itineris causa detectis repente armis concinentibusque signis per diversas portas in oppidum immisit.*

¹⁴ The penalty imposed on the town was severe: many of the citizens and local officials were sentenced to life imprisonment. This action also suggests that the problem was more significant than our sources have recorded.

¹⁵ Tacitus, *Annals* 4.27.1-2. Tacitus calls him Curtisius, but see Koestermann (1965), vol. 2, 102.

¹⁶ The number of men sent is not specified; the text is *Staius tribunus cum valida manu*.

was sent: the citizens could be reassured that everything possible was being done. It may also be the case that the praetorians were familiar with the man who was leading the revolt. Curtilius, in fact, was quickly apprehended, and without difficulty, suggesting that he was known to his captors. Once returned to Rome, it is possible that he was executed publicly in an effort to avoid any disturbance by the slave population.¹⁷ We are not told anything about what happened to those who had fallen in with him. Curtilius probably had retired to the area, involving himself in local issues that affected the slaves who worked the fields.¹⁸ The direct involvement of the emperor, however, illustrated the seriousness with which this particular incident was viewed by Tiberius.

One other case is known in which the guard was sent to enforce order in a city in Italy. It occurred in AD 58 during the reign of Nero.¹⁹ The citizens of Puteoli were upset over embezzlement by local officials. The council was complaining about public disorder.²⁰ The controversies escalated to rioting. The senate appointed Gaius Cassius Longinus to settle the matter, but when the citizens could not tolerate his severity, he asked to be relieved of the

¹⁷ A public execution would explain why Curtilius was taken to Rome. Koestermann (1965), vol. 2, 103 assumes that the death was very excruciating, but there is no evidence for this in the source. It is possible that an inscription which calls Tiberius the *conservator patriae* may refer to this incident; cf. Marangio (1992), 93-98.

¹⁸ On the retirement of praetorians both in Italy and in the provinces, see Durry (1938), 301-3.

¹⁹ Although Durry (1938), 279; 369 cites the attempted break-out of the gladiators at Praeneste in AD 64 together with this incident as examples involving the praetorians, it is not clear from the text that the guards in the Praeneste situation were from the city cohorts.

²⁰ Tacitus, *Annals* 13.48.

responsibility.²¹ It was given instead to the brothers Publius Sulpicius Scribonius Proculus and Sulpicius Scribonius Rufus.²² They were provided with a praetorian cohort, the first and only time under the Julio-Claudians that a contingent of the guard was given over to the command of men of consular rank. Tacitus records that the situation was brought under control because the citizens of Puteoli were afraid of the soldiers; this fear no doubt resulted from the executions which the commanders ordered.²³ By sending his own guard, Nero also was showing that he took a personal interest in the matter.²⁴ It was at the request of Cassius that the Scribonii were sent, and the addition of a cohort of praetorians may have been necessary if it had been decided beforehand that executions would take place, since that was one of the responsibilities of the guard.

There is only one example under the Julio-Claudians of the praetorians being used to suppress unrest outside Italy. The incident dates to circa AD 2,

²¹ For a brief analysis of Cassius' role and his possible reasons for withdrawing from the affair, see Bauman (1989), 90-92. Cf. also D'Arms (1975), 155-166.

²² These men previously had been legates in the Germanies; they were later called to Greece by Nero (perhaps in connection with the Vinician conspiracy) and were killed. Cf. Dio 63.17.2; Tacitus, *Histories* 4.41.3.

²³ Tacitus, *Annals* 13.48: . . . *cohorte praetoria, cuius terrore et paucorum supplicio rediit oppidanis concordia*. As D'Arms (1975), 157 points out, "however harsh and intolerable the *remedium* of Cassius Longinus, that of his chosen successors, the Sulpicii Scribonii, was appreciably worse, involving a cohort of the praetorian guard, which brought with it armed conflict, terror and punishment."

²⁴ Nero may have been concerned that riots in the city would cause disruption elsewhere in Italy. Puteoli had a harbour that was the hub for Rome's eastern imports and exports and was also a resort area. Disorder in the city could have devastated either of these enterprises.

when a tribune was sent to North Africa to halt an incursion from the interior.²⁵ The report in Dio is incomplete, and it is difficult to say with certainty where the guard was sent, but Cyrenaica has been suggested since it fits the description given in the passage: it was governed by a senator and was not garrisoned.²⁶ It seems from Dio's text that help had already been sent from Egypt to stop the aggressors, but without success.²⁷ Whatever the nature of the problem, it was pressing enough to force Augustus to take a personal interest, and send a senior officer from Rome who could act directly on the authority of the emperor. In fact, the tribune, presumably with at least one cohort, managed to turn back the attack. Dio adds that there was no senator governing in the area for a long period afterwards which may imply that the tribune remained there until the threat was eliminated completely.²⁸

²⁵ Dio 55.10a.1: ἐτέρους ἐκ τῆς Αἰγύπτου ἐπιστρατεύσαντάς σφισιν ἀπέώσαντο, οὐ πρότερόν τε ἐνέδοσαν πρὶν χιλιάρχον τινα ἐκ τοῦ δορυφορικοῦ ἐπ' αὐτοὺς πεμφθῆναι. καὶ ἐκεῖνος δ' ἐν χρόνῳ τὰς καταδρομὰς αὐτῶν ἐπέσχευεν, ὥστε ἐπὶ πολὺ μηδένα βουλευτὴν τῶν ταύτῃ πόλεων ἄρξαν.

²⁶ Cf. Scott-Kilver (1987), 291: "In the context the cities mentioned must be those of Cyrene, since only Cyrene and modern Tunisia (termed 'Africa' by the Romans) were normally governed by senators, and 'Africa', being an armed province, had no need of help from Egypt, whereas Cyrene had no regular garrison." See also Brunt (1983), 56. Cyrenaica had become a Roman province in 74 BC; Crete was combined with it in 67 BC. There had been problems in the area previously, and in fact, the Marmaridae had attacked the area as recently as 19 BC. Their revolt had been quashed by Publius Sulpicius Quirinus, legate of Syria at the time; cf. Florus 2.31.

²⁷ The text is corrupt, but the phrase is ἐτέρους ἐκ τῆς Αἰγύπτου ἐπιστρατεύσαντάς σφισιν ἀπέώσαντο. The III Cyrenaica was stationed in Egypt at this time.

²⁸ There is documentation that, perhaps from the reign of Augustus and certainly from that of Tiberius, an auxiliary cohort, later known as *cohors I Lusitanorum Cyrenaica*, was stationed in Cyrene. It is tempting to see its assignment to this area as a result of the disturbance of AD 2. For the evidence that this cohort was stationed there, cf. Reynolds in Ward Perkins and Ballance (1958), 160-61.

There is one other occasion when the guard was sent overseas, not to quell any disturbance, but for reconnaissance. Under Nero, the praetorians undertook a peaceful expedition to Africa. The purpose of this journey was ostensibly to find the source of the Nile, but no doubt it was for military surveillance as well. It was not the first time that the area had been explored; under Augustus, the army had reached Nabata.²⁹ But this time, the soldiers went further, reaching Meroë.³⁰ The expedition has been dated to sometime between AD 61 and 63.³¹ Although Seneca mentions it only as a scientific project, the elder Pliny records that Nero had sent a tribune accompanied by soldiers from the guard as an exploratory party because he intended to invade Ethiopia.³² The size of the contingent is unknown, but a map of the area was made, implying that military surveyors and cartographers were among those who went. Seneca records that he had obtained information from two centurions, which may provide some idea of the numbers: if the soldiers were functioning as scouts as well as surveyors mapping the area, the numbers would have been kept to a minimum so as not to attract undue

²⁹ Augustus, *Res Gestae* 27; Strabo, *Geography* 17.1.54; Pliny, *NH* 6.181. The date was 25-22 BC. The expedition was a punitive attack against the Ethiopians; it was led by Gaius Petronius, prefect of Egypt.

³⁰ Seneca, *NQ* 6.8.3-4; Pliny, *NH* 6.181-186; 12.19.

³¹ Desanges (1978), 325. The detailed description of the Nile in Lucan (*BC* 10.194-332, written in AD 62/3) provides support for this date.

³² *NH* 6.181: *missi ab [Nerone] milites praetoriani cum tribuno ad explorandum, inter reliqua bella et Aethiopicum cogitanti*. Cf. also Dio 63.8.1 who records that Nero had sent spies (κατασκόπους) to Ethiopia in anticipation of an invasion, but later abandoned the idea because of its difficulty.

attention.³³ It seems inconceivable, however, that the praetorians would have been sent if there had been no military intent.³⁴

The *Speculatores*

Exploits such as the investigation of the Nile region often were assigned to members of the guard known as the *speculatores*. These soldiers were employed in tasks which were of a sensitive nature, that is, those involving issues of security or a need for covert activity.³⁵ As a result, information about this group is scarce in the sources. In the period of the republic, *speculatores* were members of the army engaged primarily in reconnoitering, and in fact, Antony had a cohort of *speculatores*, which he commemorated on his coinage.³⁶ These men may

³³ Contra Desanges (1978), 324, note 88 who argues for at least five centurions to have accompanied the tribune.

³⁴ Contra Sherk (1974), 541 who argues, based on the evidence of the map, that the purpose was "basically scientific in nature." Durry (1938), 280 also sees the expedition as a geographical mission "to bring Italian civilization to savage regions." Cf. also Griffin (1984), 229.

³⁵ The institution of a formal secret police force, known as the *frumentarii*, came about late in the first century AD, or early in the second century. Their primary duties were spying, and soon executions, but they also were employed as couriers, tax collectors, and policemen. Cf. Sinnigen (1961), 65-73; Austin and Rankov (1995), *passim*. The *speculatores* continued to exist after the introduction of the *frumentarii*.

³⁶ Republic: Durry (1938), 108; Passerini (1939), 70. See, for example, Caesar *BAfr* 37.1 in which he ordered his *speculatores* to be ready to assist him, but the rest of his legions were not informed of his plans. Durry also argued that the unit of 300 soldiers with each of the triumvirs at their meeting at Bologne were *speculatores*. Antony: The legend reads CHORTIS SPECULATORUM. The coin was issued in 32/31 BC (just prior to Actium); cf. Passerini (1939), 71; Sydenham (1952), # 1214. See figure 8. Taken with the other coin minted at the same time but with the legend CHORTIUM PRAETORIARUM (cf. figure 2), it seems clear that these were two separate units.

have acted as his bodyguard in addition to being his scouts or spies.³⁷ The imperial unit undoubtedly was adapted from this republican prototype early in the reign of Augustus.³⁸ Although the evidence is scant, it is probable that, for most of the first century AD at least, the *speculatores* associated with the praetorians formed a unit of their own, but technically were considered part of the guard.³⁹ Evidence for this may come from a passage in Tacitus' *Histories*, for it was the *tesserarius speculatorum*, joined by the *optio*, who were first approached by Otho to win over the guard in his campaign for emperor.⁴⁰ By the end of the first century AD, however, the *speculatores* had been distributed throughout the praetorian cohorts. This may have happened in the reign of Vitellius; since the *speculatores* had been responsible for the accession of Otho and had fought in the field with him, their continued existence as a separate unit might have been

³⁷ Speidel (1994), 33: "The name of the *speculatores* betrays their origin: reconnaissance was so essential to Roman field marshals, and so risky, that their reconnoitering force became their bodyguard." Each legion in the imperial period also had ten *speculatores*, who were assigned to the staff of the governor, and functioned as couriers, bodyguards, and often as executioners. See, for example, Seneca, *De Ira* 1.18.4 in which a centurion is in charge of the execution of a soldier, but it is the *speculator* who is about to perform the act. Cf. also Le Bohec (1994), 51; Webster (1985), 263.

³⁸ Durry (1938), 108. Sinnigen (1961), 66 remarks on the first emperors making use of officers of the guard to "act as plain-clothes men and to arrest those accused of treason" but without specific reference to the *speculatores*. Inscriptions of *speculatores Caesaris* which date to the early part of the first century AD have been discovered. Cf. CIL 6.1921a (=ILS 2014); CIL 3.4843 (=ILS 2015). The use of the phrase *speculator Caesaris* or *Augusti* in these inscriptions is found only in the early part of the first century AD. At some time after AD 23, they are simply referred to as *speculatores*. Cf. Speidel (1994), 34.

³⁹ It is possible that Dio's count of ten cohorts may have included the *speculatores* as a separate unit. Cf. above, "Augustus", 25-26.

⁴⁰ Tacitus, *Histories* 1.25.1. The *tesserarius* was the officer who conveyed the watchword to the rest of the cohort. Cf. Hurley (1993), 163.

deemed undesirable.⁴¹ The close relationship between emperor and *speculatores* existed from the creation of the unit. Suetonius records how Augustus entertained a former *speculator* at whose home he had often stayed.⁴² Their significance is shown by one of the earliest extant military diplomata in which members of the unit are singled out, and placed first, in the list of those honoured by the document.⁴³

It is not certain how many men comprised this unit. By the middle of the first century, the *speculatores* were commanded by a soldier known as a *trecenarius*.⁴⁴ This title has led to the conjecture that the unit comprised 300 men,

⁴¹ *Accession*: Tacitus, *Histories* 1.27. *Fighting*: Tacitus, *Histories* 2.11. Speidel (1994), 34 argues that their inclusion in this passage indicates that the strength of the unit had to be sufficient to make a difference in the field. But it is more likely that because the *speculatores* did not usually take part in battle, they were specified in the list.

⁴² Suetonius, *Augustus* 74: *ipse [Augustus] scribit, invitasse se quondam, in cuius villa maneret, qui speculator suus olim fuisset*. Durry (1938), 108 believes that the cohort to which this soldier belonged was one which was contemporary with that of Antony's.

⁴³ CIL 16.21 (=ILS 1993), dating to AD 76. The relevant lines are:

nomina speculatorum, qui in praetorio meo militaverunt, item militum,
qui in cohortibus novem praetoriis et quattuor urbanis, subieci

"I have appended the names of the *speculatores* who served in my guard,
and also of those soldiers who were members of the nine praetorian and
four urban cohorts"

The wording of the diploma need not mean, as Speidel (1994), 35 argues, that the *speculatores* were still a separate unit at this time. The fact that they are mentioned separately from the praetorian cohorts may be the way that their importance is emphasized.

⁴⁴ This position was equivalent to the *primus pilus* of the legion, that is, it was the senior post among centurions of the guard. After serving as *trecenarius*, the officer generally proceeded to a legionary centurionate. Cf. Breeze (1974b), 12; Dobson and Breeze (1969), 119; Le Bohec (1994), 21.

but such a number is not corroborated by other evidence.⁴⁵ For most of the Julio-Claudian period, in fact, the commander was known simply as the *centurio speculatorum*.⁴⁶ There is also controversy over whether all of these soldiers were mounted.⁴⁷ Many of them certainly were, since one of their main responsibilities was to courier imperial correspondence. In fact, it was probably members of this unit that Sejanus utilized to carry correspondence between Rome and Capri, and no doubt the same group was used by Macro to convey the information about Tiberius' death to the provincial governors.⁴⁸ In the latter instance, sending the *speculatores* allowed reports of the reaction of those to whom he had sent his messages to be brought back to Macro. But since this cohort of the guard also

⁴⁵ The idea originated with Domaszewski; cf. Passerini (1939), 70, note 6. It is important to note, however, that three hundred is roughly the same number of *speculatores* that were found in the legions under Augustus (each legion supplied ten *speculatores* to the staff of the governor), and so the conjecture may have been an attempt to harmonize these numbers.

⁴⁶ Cf. Passerini (1939), 70. The title seems to continue even after the use of *trecenarius* came into vogue in the reign of Nero. For an example of a career which included the post of *centurio speculatorum*, see that of Marcus Vettius Valens, below, "The Guard in Civil Administration", 192-94.

⁴⁷ Cf. Passerini (1939), 71-72; Durry (1938), 110; Speidel (1994), 33-34; Grant (1974), 91. There is much confusion about the overlap between the *speculatores* and the *Germani corporis custodes*, many of whom were mounted. As part of the guard, however, the *speculatores* had greater possibility for advancement and were considered an integral part of the military. Speidel (1994), 35 argues that the duplication of responsibilities between the two groups resulted from the unwillingness of the emperors to use foreigners against citizens in the street, but the *speculatores* were certainly used for much more than just crowd control.

⁴⁸ *Couriers*: Suetonius, *Caligula* 44.2: *magnificas Romam litteras misit, monitis speculatoribus, ut vehiculo ad Forum usque et curiam pertenderent nec nisi in aede Martis ac frequente senatu consulibus traderent*. Cf. Hurley (1993), 163. Macro: Grant (1974), 141.

had to function as the bodyguard of the emperor, they could not always be mounted, depending on how the emperor was moving about.⁴⁹

One of the most important tasks of the *speculatores* was spying, which possibly derived from their ability to travel about freely as couriers in the name of the emperor. The sources do not provide many examples of this activity, which is not surprising given its nature.⁵⁰ In one of the few specific references we have, Suetonius reports that they accompanied Claudius to banquets: *neque convivia inire ausus est nisi ut speculatores cum lanceis circumstarent militesque vice ministrorum fungerentur*.⁵¹ It seems clear from the text that the *speculatores* were there simply to observe, that is to spy on the dinner guests, with other members of the guard present to wait on the emperor. Despite the dearth of evidence in the sources, the unit must have been used constantly for spying, and it is probable, for example, that the surveillance carried out under Tiberius to spy on the activities of Agrippina Maior and her two sons, or by Nero on Lucius Antistius Vetus fell to them.⁵²

⁴⁹ Grant (1974), 91 argues that the first priority of the *speculatores* was to "save the Imperator from assassination" which would be logical, given that they were part of the praetorian guard. They carried lances to aid in crowd control; cf. Speidel (1994), 33.

⁵⁰ Rudich (1993), 135: "Intuition and common sense . . . point to the inevitability, under tyrannical rule, of some kind of a special repressive and investigative machinery. A few scattered hints in our sources do, indeed, imply the operation of a certain network of secret agents in the early Empire . . ." See Dio 52.37.2, who comments on the need for spies in a system such as the one which Augustus has implemented; Grant (1974), 91.

⁵¹ Suetonius, *Claudius* 35.1. Cf. also Dio 60.3.3.

⁵² *Agrippina*: Tacitus, *Annals* 4.67.4. *Vetus*: Tacitus, *Annals* 16.10.2.

One place where the *speculatores* undoubtedly were used as spies was at the games. Tacitus notes that, under Nero, there were men in attendance to record who was at the events and what their expressions betrayed about the performance; it is most likely that these men would be *speculatores*, though they are not named in the text.⁵³ The presence of so many people in one place at such spectacles was a constant concern to the emperors, and it was only logical that soldiers from the emperor's personal guard be assigned to the task of collecting information on what was being said to whom at such performances. There is a passage from Epictetus which illustrates the sort of role these men may have played: "A soldier dressed as a civilian sits down next to you and starts to denounce the emperor. Then, because you have a kind of pledge from him of his good faith since he began the abuse, you yourself say what you think, and are immediately carted off to prison."⁵⁴ Since the praetorians were employed as security at the games, the specific use of the *speculatores* at these events may have resulted from their belonging to the guard.⁵⁵

⁵³ Tacitus, *Annals* 16.5.2: *quippe gravior inerat metus, si spectaculo defuissent, multis palam et pluribus occultis, ut nomina ac vultus, alacritatem tristitiamque coeuntium scrutarentur.* . .

⁵⁴ Epictetus, *Discourses* 4.13.5. The text dates to the early second century AD. Campbell (1994), 191 points to the similar case of Votienus Montanus in the reign of Tiberius; cf. Tacitus, *Annals* 4.42.2. Grant (1970), 212 attributes the increased use of the "intelligence service" under Nero to the machinations of Tigellinus. Philostratus (*Life of Apollonius* 4.43) records that the same prefect used "all the eyes with which the government sees" to watch Apollonius; it is hard not to interpret this as referring to the *speculatores*.

⁵⁵ Rudich (1993), 135, comments on the difficulty in determining which official was "in charge of supervising such clandestine government activities as the collection of information relevant to the enhancement of imperial security." Given the fact that such a task seems to have fallen primarily to the *speculatores*, and that they were a unit of the guard, it is clear that the praetorian prefect had ultimate responsibility for such activity.

The *speculatores* were a special unit under the Julio-Claudians, and their responsibilities revolved very closely around the emperor, more so, in fact, than the other cohorts of the praetorian guard. It is therefore no wonder that it was these soldiers who often were entrusted to be the emperor's executioners.⁵⁶ Since such deeds needed to be accomplished quickly and quietly, the unit associated with clandestine activity was used. It is also reasonable to assign to them the various instances of political executions carried out under the Julio-Claudians. It has been pointed out that the *speculatores* of the legions were "concerned with the custody of prisoners and the execution of the condemned."⁵⁷ There is no reason to think that the *speculatores* associated with the guard would not have carried out similar tasks, but at the behest of the emperor himself. An examination of such incidents of confinement and executions under the Julio-Claudians reveals that the praetorians were involved in many of these cases, though it is impossible to say with any certainty which specific unit of the guard was assigned to the task.

⁵⁶ One of the offices which ranked below that of the *speculator* in the guard was the *a quaestionibus praetorio praefecti*. This post seems to have been equivalent to the *questionarius* of the legion, a position which has been interpreted to be a torturer. Cf. Durry (1938), 112; Le Bohec (1994), 56; CIL 6.2755 (=ILS 2145).

⁵⁷ Jones (1960), 161, citing Seneca, *De Ben.* 3.25 and *De Ira* 1.18.4.

Confinement and Executions

In the republic, the responsibility for arrest and confinement in Rome rested with the *tresviri capitales* who were members of the *vigintisexviri*, a group of minor magistrates in Rome. Cicero records that their particular duties included the imprisonment of criminals and the application of capital punishment.⁵⁸ It is uncertain whether these magistrates “exercised a summary criminal jurisdiction over slaves and humble citizens”; in the cases where the *tresviri capitales* made arrests, it is possible that they were acting on the authority of the senate.⁵⁹ The *tresviri capitales* also seem to have been in charge of the prisons in Rome, and therefore supervised any executions which occurred there, though they did not carry out the task themselves, leaving that to the *carnifex*, “a man so polluted that he was not supposed to enter the Forum or to live within the *pomerium*.”⁶⁰

In the imperial period, it became the responsibility of the urban cohorts, under the direction of the urban prefect, to look after public order.⁶¹ This unit had been established by Augustus, who realized the need to have such a force on

⁵⁸ Cicero, *De Legibus* 3.3.6. Robinson (1992), 175 notes that these magistrates “were normally young men hopeful of a senatorial career, for which this was the first step on the civilian ladder.”

⁵⁹ Nippel (1984), 21; (1995), 22-26. Christ (1984), 123 offers a slightly different interpretation, arguing that the *tresviri* had greater power in policing and in the carrying out of sentences.

⁶⁰ Robinson (1992), 179, citing Cicero, *Pro Rab.* 5.15. The death penalty was imposed for various crimes, ranging from poisoning to incendiarism; see Christ (1984), 123.

⁶¹ The office of the *tresviri capitales* continued to exist, however, and there are occasional references to them in the literature. For example, Tacitus, *Agricola* 2.

patrol in the city, given the size of the population.⁶² "Granting the city prefect command over three separate cohorts was probably not just a political gesture towards the Senate and the nobility, but an effort to supply the magistrates responsible for the security of the city . . . with effective means of control ready at hand, especially when the emperor was not present."⁶³ There are many examples of citizens being arrested, imprisoned and executed, but often without reference to the persons carrying out these acts. One might cite, among other examples, the case of Considius Proculus, who in AD 33 was arrested while celebrating his birthday, charged with treason, condemned in the senate, and immediately executed.⁶⁴ This incident illustrates the nature of the problem in discussing these cases: we do not know the specific charges, nor do we know where Proculus was held, or by whom he was executed, though the employment of a public executioner, presumably in the prison itself, is known from other cases.⁶⁵ The responsibility of arrest in general belonged to members of the urban

⁶² The exact date of the creation of the urban cohorts is unknown, but it most likely occurred at the time when the praetorians were organized in a formal way as the bodyguard of the emperor. Cf. Suetonius, Augustus 49.1. For the date, see Freis (1967), 4-5; Passerini (1939), 44-45; Cadoux (1959), 156.

⁶³ Nippel (1995), 92. The specific nature of the duties of the urban cohorts under the Julio-Claudians is not well documented; cf. Freis (1967), 44; Homo (1956), 167; Nippel (1995), 94-95. The urban prefect was chosen from among the ranks of the senators, the only prefecture that was not equestrian. It is not known for certain when the first urban prefect was appointed; Vitucci (1956), 113-15 provides a list of prefects for the Julio-Claudian period, beginning with Messalla Corvinus in 26 BC.

⁶⁴ Tacitus, *Annals* 6.18.1.

⁶⁵ For example, the execution of the children of Sejanus after the fall of their father (AD 33) (Dio 58.11.5); the case of Vibulenus Agrippa who took poison in the senate house and was carted off to prison to be executed (AD 36) (Tacitus, *Annals* 6.40.1); or the incident involving Sextus

cohorts since they were in charge of ensuring the security of the city as a whole.⁶⁶ But we have no specific examples of such activity in our sources, unless the incident involving Julius Celsus falls into this category.⁶⁷

Sometimes we are given information about those who were involved in cases of confinement or execution. For example, Asinius Gallus was arrested by a praetor in AD 30 and led off to what he assumed would be his execution; however, he remained under house arrest, the responsibility of the consuls and praetors, until he died in AD 33.⁶⁸ Junius Gallio, who had been exiled by Tiberius for allegedly attempting to subvert the guard, was returned to Rome and kept under house arrest in the custody of the magistrates.⁶⁹ Plass refers to this type of confinement as “a more calculatedly sinister limbo between life and death.”⁷⁰ In the cases of Gaius Fufius Geminus (under Tiberius) and Thrasea

Paconianus who was strangled in prison because he had composed verses critical of the emperor while there (AD 35) (Tacitus, *Annals* 6.39).

⁶⁶ In cases which required a high degree of security, or which involved members of the nobility, the guard was used instead of the urban cohorts.

⁶⁷ Tacitus, *Annals* 6.9.2–4; cf. Levick (1976), 203. In AD 32, five senators were charged with treason and Celsus, a tribune from the urban cohorts, acted as one of the informers and secured the release of two of the accused. It is possible he had acted as the arresting officer, and had gained information which exonerated the men. Celsus himself was charged with conspiracy the next year, and committed suicide while in custody; cf. Tacitus, *Annals* 6.14.1. Marsh (1931), 204 errs in referring to Celsus as a member of the praetorians.

⁶⁸ Tacitus, *Annals* 6.23.1; Dio 58.3.4–6. Cf. Hennig (1975), 103–6. Dio comments on the harshness of Gallus’ treatment; this is questioned by Marsh (1931), 276 who points to the lack of corroboration in Tacitus. It is possible that Gallus died of enforced starvation; cf. Seager (1972), 233.

⁶⁹ Dio 58.18.4; cf. Tacitus, *Annals* 6.3.3. See also the case of Titius Sabinus who was held in prison and then executed (AD 28): Tacitus, *Annals* 4.68–70; Pliny, *NH* 8.145; Dio 58.1.1b–3.

⁷⁰ Plass (1995), 173. Since prisons generally were not used for long-term incarceration at this time, the phrase in Dio (ἐς φυλακὴν τοῖς ἀρχουσιν) has been interpreted to indicate house arrest. Cf.

Paetus (under Nero), quaestors were sent to inform them of their impending deaths.⁷¹ And, in AD 16, Publius Marcius was executed *extra portam Esquilinam, cum classicum canere iussissent, more prisco*; the sounding of the trumpet probably indicated a public execution.⁷² But more often the incidents simply are recorded without further comment.

Sometimes, however, we have evidence of the involvement of the praetorian guard in these cases. There is a precedent for the use of the military in arrest, interrogation, and execution that dates to the period of the triumvirate of Octavian. Suetonius records an incident in which the praetor Quintus Gallius, suspected to be carrying a sword as he paid his respects to Octavian, was removed by centurions and soldiers, tortured and then executed.⁷³ By the reign of Tiberius, praetorians were being used for surveillance of those who had been banished, for interrogation and torture of prisoners, and in particular, for

Dio 59.6.2, for the case of Pomponius Secundus, who had been jailed for seven years and treated poorly; the phrase used is ἐν τῷ οἰκήμασι. He was released by Caligula.

⁷¹ *Geminus*: Dio 58.4.5-6. *Thrasea*: Tacitus, *Annals* 16.32.1. Given Nero's excessive arrangements for security at the senate meeting where Thraea was convicted, the use of a quaestor may result from the emperor's desire to maintain the fiction of a legal proceeding which had included a trial in the senate, though the absence of the guard is unusual. For Thrasea's trial, see Bauman (1974), 153-57.

⁷² Tacitus, *Annals* 2.32.3; Furneaux (1896), vol. 1, 322. This particular execution may be included by Tacitus because it followed the "ancient custom"; cf. Suetonius, *Claudius* 25 for executions in the same location. In other cases, the act took place in the prison (for example, Clutorius Priscus; cf. Tacitus, *Annals* 3.51.1) or the accused was thrown from the Tarpeian Rock (for example, Sextus Marius; cf. *ibid.*, 6.19.1).

⁷³ Suetonius, *Augustus* 27.4. Gaggero (1990), 237, note 9 dates this episode to 43-42 BC.

executions.⁷⁴ It should be noted that, in general, we are dealing only with the upper classes of Roman society, and almost all of the examples are political in nature.⁷⁵ Yavetz comments on the use of the guard to quell “the unruly behaviour of the *plebs* . . . the dispatch of a praetorian cohort, several executions – and order would once more be restored.”⁷⁶ But this is a unique situation for the guard. It occurred in AD 58, at Puteoli, with the praetorians being under the command of the brothers Scribonii and should not be used as proof of the praetorians’ involvement in executions of the lower classes.

After the death of Augustus in AD 14, the first act of the new regime recorded in the sources is the execution of Agrippa Postumus, with a member of the guard as agent.⁷⁷ Agrippa had been banished to the island of Planasia by Augustus with soldiers from the ranks of the praetorians guarding him, no doubt so that the emperor could be kept informed about his activities.⁷⁸ On the accession of Tiberius, a centurion killed Agrippa. This is the earliest example in

⁷⁴ As, for example, in the case of the mutineers in Pannonia where those members of the guard who were with Drusus executed the ringleaders; cf. Tacitus, *Annals* 1.30.1. See above, 128.

⁷⁵ Examples involving the lower classes are few; for example, cf. Seneca (*De Tranq.* 14.7) in which some of those being led off to execution by a centurion (from the prison of the *Castra Praetoria*?) may have been members of the lower classes, but it is impossible to tell. It is also in Seneca (*De Clementia* 2.1.2) that we hear of Burrus being involved in the execution of two *latrones* of unknown origin, presumably not doing the act himself, but delegating it to his officers. Soldiers were used, however, to execute those who protested at the games about tax increases under Caligula; cf. Josephus, *AJ* 19.24–26; Dio 59.28.11.

⁷⁶ Yavetz (1969), 12; cf. Tacitus, *Annals* 13.48.3.

⁷⁷ Tacitus, *Annals* 1.6.1; Suetonius, *Tiberius* 22.

⁷⁸ Suetonius, *Augustus* 65.4.

the sources of such a high profile execution carried out by a praetorian officer, though it is likely that others had occurred in the previous regime. Tacitus notes that the man found the task difficult, though he was of firm resolve.⁷⁹ Although the soldiers had sworn an oath to ensure the security of the imperial family as well as that of the emperor, this incident clearly illustrates the pragmatism of the guard. The praetorians, and especially the officers, acknowledged that sometimes there would be a conflict between their oath and the demands of the emperor. Therefore, when a direct order was issued from the princeps which contravened this oath, the choice was simple: the man who was their commander-in-chief must be obeyed.⁸⁰ It is not certain in this instance where the order originated; when the centurion reported to the new emperor that he had carried out his command, Tiberius appeared not to know what he meant. Tacitus adds, however, that the instructions had been relayed by Gaius Sallustius Crispus, a friend of Tiberius, to a tribune of the guard, who presumably then had passed along the command to his subordinate.⁸¹ It is possible that Augustus had left orders that Agrippa be executed upon his death, and the letter then would

⁷⁹ Tacitus, *Annals* 1.6.1: *quamvis firmatus animo centurio aegre confecit*. This statement seems to negate the possibility of independent action on the part of the centurion as presented by Dio (57.3.6). See also Suetonius, *Tiberius* 22 where it is reported incorrectly that it was a tribune who murdered him.

⁸⁰ On the type of oath sworn by the army, cf. Campbell (1984), 26-8; Hennig (1975), 127-8; Brunt and Moore (1967), 67-68.

⁸¹ Tacitus, *Annals* 1.6.3. Cf. Rogers (1935), 2. For Crispus, see Crook (1955), 34; Kehoe (1984/5), 247-254. He had been a confidant of Augustus as well.

have relayed the news that the emperor had died.⁸² Because of the fear of retaliation, Crispus is said to have warned Livia that certain things were best left undisclosed, among which were duties performed by the military. The need for such secrecy in many executions no doubt provided the rationale for using praetorians, and in particular, the *speculatores*.⁸³

Under Tiberius, members of the guard also kept an eye on those whom the emperor deemed a threat or who were waiting to be tried; in some cases, this resulted in the suicide of the accused. In AD 16, Marcus Scribonius Libo Drusus was charged with conspiracy. He was granted an adjournment during his trial and allowed to return to his house, accompanied by soldiers.⁸⁴ Tacitus describes the guard as disturbing the dinner-party which Libo had decided to give as his final act: *strepebant etiam in vestibulo, ut audiri, ut aspici possent, cum Libo ipsis . . . epulis excruciatas*. It seems clear that the intention here was to coerce Libo to kill

⁸² Cf. Seager (1972), 48-50, who notes that "neither Sallustius nor Livia had the power to give orders to the centurion of the praetorian guard who actually carried out the execution; with Augustus dead, Tiberius alone had the right." Cf. also Levick (1976), 151; Lewis (1970), 165-184. For a discussion of the various interpretations, see Marsh (1931), 278.

⁸³ Secrecy is evident as well in the case of Clemens, one of Agrippa Postumus' slaves, who pretended to be his master. He was brought to Rome by Crispus and executed in a secluded part of the palace, probably by a praetorian, given the location and clandestine nature of the murder. Cf. Tacitus, *Annals* 2.40.2; Rogers (1935), 21-2; Seager (1972), 93; Kehoe (1984/85), 248-51. Guard members were sent as well to ensure the death of Sempronius Gracchus in the same year. He had been exiled by Augustus, and when Tiberius became emperor, soldiers were sent to kill him. Cf. Tacitus, *Annals* 1.53.3-5.

⁸⁴ Tacitus, *Annals* 2.31.1; cf. also Seneca, *Ep.* 70.10; Suetonius, *Tiberius* 25.1; 3; Dio 57.15.4-5; Velleius Paterculus, *Histories* 2.129.2; 130.3. For the charges, see Bauman (1974), 60-1; Marsh (1931), 58-60; Seager (1972), 89-92.

himself once he realized that there was no hope of escaping conviction.⁸⁵

Another case of confinement involving the praetorians is that of Gnaeus Calpurnius Piso in AD 20. After his trial, he was sent home under guard, specifically a praetorian tribune, though Tacitus says that it was not clear whether this soldier was there to ensure Piso's safety or his death.⁸⁶ Piso killed himself after being rejected by both the senate and Tiberius, but constant surveillance by an officer of the guard no doubt would have added to his desperation, and in fact, there was a rumour that he had been murdered.⁸⁷ Enforced suicides such as these have been seen as constituting "hybrid self-execution which, conveniently for the emperor, could be thought of as both criminal-free and victimless."⁸⁸ The praetorians persuaded the accused through intimidation to perform an action which would exonerate the emperor from the

⁸⁵ Cf. Koestermann (1965), vol. 1, 306; Furneaux (1896), vol. 1, 320. Rogers (1935), 18, note 58 comments that "Seneca makes the suicide premeditated; it is not clear in Tacitus whether the suicide was the result of deliberation or sudden terror of anticipated execution."

⁸⁶ Tacitus, *Annals* 3.14.5; cf. Koestermann (1965), vol. 1, 443-5; Durry (1938), 278. Yavetz (1969), 28 points to the violent reaction of the people in Rome over the death of Germanicus, in particular, their anger with Piso whom they believed to be guilty. It may have been such demonstrations that prompted the use of the guard.

⁸⁷ Tacitus, *Annals* 3.16.1.

⁸⁸ Plass (1995), 93. There has been much debate over the value of suicide before conviction as a method of allowing those who survive to escape further punishment and in assuring that the victim's will was honoured. See Tacitus, *Annals* 6.29; Dio 58.15.2-4. The argument in favour of such an interpretation is made, for example, by de Visscher (1957b), 176-9 and Plass (1995), 104; that against by Rogers (1952), 282. For suicide in the Roman world, see Grisé (1982).

murder of a prominent citizen, and allow the emperor as well to claim that he would have interceded on behalf of the defendant if he had been found guilty.⁸⁹

The imperial family also endured guarded confinement under Tiberius. Praetorians were used to provide information to Sejanus about the actions of Agrippina and Nero Caesar.⁹⁰ After their trial in AD 29, both were exiled; Suetonius records that, whenever they were moved after this, they were bound and kept under heavy guard to prevent anyone making contact with them.⁹¹ Agrippina was banished to Pandateria where she was kept under close guard. She is said to have lost the use of an eye as a result of a beating by the centurion who was in charge of her, and was force-fed to prevent suicide by starvation.⁹² Nero was sent to Pontia, no doubt accompanied by members of the guard.⁹³ Suetonius includes the rumour that an executioner was sent to him in exile, the appearance of whom led him to kill himself. Again, there is the idea that the

⁸⁹ As in Libo's case; see Tacitus, *Annals* 2.31.3.

⁹⁰ Tacitus, *Annals* 4.67.4: *quis additus miles nuntios introitus, aperta secreta velut in annales referebat*. Cf. Barrett (1996), 36-7; Martin and Woodman (1989), 246. The result was charges against Agrippina and her sons. They were undoubtedly confined under house arrest, with praetorians to guard them; cf. Barrett (1996), 36-37. For the background to the situation between Tiberius and Agrippina, see Bauman (1992), 138-56.

⁹¹ Suetonius, *Tiberius* 64; cf. Pliny, *NH* 8.145; Philo, in *Flaccum* 3.9.

⁹² Suetonius, *Tiberius* 53.2; see Seager (1972), 211. Agrippina died, still in exile, in AD 33; cf. Tacitus, *Annals* 6.25.3.

⁹³ Suetonius, *Tiberius* 54.2.

arrival of this figure was enough to ensure the suicide, whether or not that was the intention.⁹⁴

Nero's brother Drusus also suffered. He was imprisoned on the Palatine after being declared a public enemy.⁹⁵ Given the location, supervision by soldiers would be likely. In AD 33, he died, starved to death according to the sources.⁹⁶ Tacitus adds that Drusus was beaten by a centurion named Attius who also recorded his final words and announced them to the senate.⁹⁷ Both Nero and Drusus had been under surveillance before and after their arrests; spies had reported every look and every saying that each man had made.⁹⁸ It seems from the text (*adpositi custodes*) that the task was carried out by the praetorians who were in attendance as the personal guard for the young princes.⁹⁹ Ironically, the unit originally intended as an honour and for protection turned out in these instances to be an instrument of destruction.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁴ Plass (1995), 114. Marsh (1931), 194 blames Sejanus, acting through Nero's guard, for the death.

⁹⁵ Dio 58.3.8; Suetonius, *Tiberius* 54.2. The brevity of the account in Dio leaves much unanswered, though he does mention the involvement of Sejanus in ensuring that a charge was laid once Drusus arrived in Rome.

⁹⁶ Tacitus, *Annals* 6.23.2; Suetonius, *Tiberius* 54.2. Cf. Seager (1972), 231-2; Barrett (1996), 47-48.

⁹⁷ Tacitus, *Annals* 6.24.2.

⁹⁸ Tacitus, *Annals* 4.60.1; 6.24.1. Agrippina also was watched; *ibid.*, 4.67.4.

⁹⁹ Koestermann (1965), vol. 2, 200 notes that those who had informed on Agrippina came from the ranks of the praetorians but it is not discernable from the text whether they had been assigned as a "military guard of honour." Yet, based on the analogy of Nero and Drusus, the soldiers fulfilled two functions: protection and spying.

¹⁰⁰ One might also add to this list the two Julias, daughter and grand-daughter of Augustus, who had been banished by him and died in the reign of Tiberius. Cf. Velleius Paterculus, *Historiae*

The guard's responsibility for supervision extended beyond surveillance of individuals. In the case of Aemilia Lepida, tried in AD 20, her slaves had been kept in prison watched over by the praetorians (*militari custodia*) until they were handed over to the consuls for interrogation.¹⁰¹ Where they were held is not entirely clear. There was a prison in the *Castra Praetoria*, but it is doubtful whether the camp had been completed by this date.¹⁰² A prison under the control of the guard must have existed prior to the construction of the *Castra Praetoria*, perhaps in close proximity to the site of the camp, but there is no evidence for it in the archaeological record.¹⁰³ Levick comments on the increase in the number of imprisonments under Tiberius, "due partly to the introduction of an effective death penalty, which meant that the accused person had to be prevented from escaping both before and after the verdict."¹⁰⁴ It is to be expected that the guard would be involved in many cases, in particular when the accused were held in the prison of the *Castra Praetoria*. Other, more furtive demands made of the praetorians – for example, surveillance before arrest –

2.100.5; Suetonius, *Augustus* 65; Tacitus, *Annals* 4.71.4; Dio 55.10.14; 55.1; 57.18.1a; Seager (1972), 50; Barrett (1996), 19-20.

¹⁰¹ Tacitus, *Annals* 3.22.3. See also Bauman (1972), 173-76.

¹⁰² Koestermann (1965), vol. 2, 458, however, notes that "the slaves of Lepida . . . had been in military custody in the praetorian barracks . . ."

¹⁰³ The main prison in Rome was the *Carcer* on the slopes of the Capitoline, but other prisons are known by the beginning of the second century; cf. Juvenal 3.312-14; Robinson (1992), 194-5. Prisons generally were used only for holding defendants or persons who were to be executed, and were not intended for long-term incarceration; cf. Millar (1984), 131.

¹⁰⁴ Levick (1972), 188; cf. also 284, note 58 for a list of those held under Tiberius.

would not be recorded in the sources but must have occurred when the situation warranted increased security.¹⁰⁵ This being the case, the fall of Sejanus is of interest because of the absence of the praetorians in any capacity. Sejanus was arrested in the senate by the prefect of the *vigiles*, and escorted to prison by him and by one of the consuls plus the other magistrates who were present.¹⁰⁶ Later that same day he was executed.¹⁰⁷ It is possible that the prefect's executioner was a member of the guard, though it is recorded that his children were killed by a public executioner, and it is unlikely that Macro would have entrusted that task to a praetorian officer who might be unwilling to carry it out.¹⁰⁸

The emergence of the treason trials under Tiberius, and his paranoia about security, which increased over the years and in particular after the fall of Sejanus, resulted in the deaths of many prominent Romans.¹⁰⁹ Suetonius remarks on the emperor's cruelty to his victims, detailing executions at the rate of twenty a day;

¹⁰⁵ As, for example, in the case of Rubrius Fabatus, who in AD 33 had tried to escape to Parthia and was brought back to Rome by a centurion; Tacitus (*Annals* 6.14.2) records that there were guards watching him (*custodes additi*), which seems to suggest that he had been under surveillance by praetorians as he headed east. This is the same expression used of those who were spying on Nero Caesar and Agrippina; cf. above, note 90. It is possible that assignments such as these often fell to the *speculatores*.

¹⁰⁶ Dio 58.10.5-8.

¹⁰⁷ This action directly contravened the ten-day waiting period between conviction and execution enacted by Tiberius in 21; cf. Tacitus, *Annals* 3.51.1; Levick (1976), 288, note 107; Bauman (1989), 82.

¹⁰⁸ Dio 58.11.5. The term used is ὁ δημιος which is found, however, in Josephus in reference to members of the guard; see below, 159.

¹⁰⁹ Seneca (*De Ben.* 3.26) comments that the treason trials under Tiberius resulted in more deaths than in the civil war. On treason trials in this period, see Bauman (1974), *passim*; Rogers (1935), *passim*, especially 190-96; Levick (1976), 184-5; Griffin (1995), 49-57.

he adds that there was an area on Capri still pointed to in his time where victims had been put to death after torture.¹¹⁰ Whether the exact nature of the tortures or the number of victims can be believed, it is probable that in many of these interrogations and executions, members of the guard would have been involved, and in the case of Capri, specifically those who were in attendance on the emperor.

The transition of power to Caligula apparently brought about a decline in the incidences of confinement and executions. At the beginning of the reign, Macro was involved in the case of Herod Agrippa, who had been imprisoned in AD 36 for seditious speech. Josephus records that the prefect was ordered by Tiberius to arrest Agrippa and haul him to jail.¹¹¹ It seems that he was taken to the prison in the *Castra Praetoria*, for there was a soldier in charge, soldiers were guarding the prisoners, and Agrippa is said to have been chained to a centurion.¹¹² It was Macro who granted permission for leniency toward the prisoner at the request of Antonia; this is not surprising since the prefect would

¹¹⁰ Suetonius, *Tiberius* 61.2-62.3. Suetonius also comments here on Tiberius' cruel treatment of those being held in prisons. Seager (1972), 232-3 connects the figure of 20 executions per day with the command dating to the summer of AD 33 to dispose of adherents of Sejanus who were still in prison; cf. Tacitus, *Annals* 6.19.

¹¹¹ Josephus, *AJ* 18.196-204. Durry (1938), 172 used this passage to argue that the praetorian prefects were put in charge of high-profile prisoners, but it is more likely that their responsibility extended only to those prisoners kept in the prison of the praetorian camp.

¹¹² Josephus (*AJ* 18.235) also records that when Agrippa was released, it was from the camp where he had been held, further evidence that his place of confinement was the *Castra Praetoria*. During the reign of Claudius, it is likely that Mithridates received the same sort of treatment. Tacitus (*Annals* 12.21) records that he was handed over to guards (*custodes*) in the city. Given the status of the prisoner, it would be logical for these men to have come from the ranks of the praetorians.

have had control over what went on in the prison.¹¹³ The concessions given to Agrippa apparently included freedom to go to the baths, for he was on his way there when the news of Tiberius' death was brought to him. Later that same day, the centurion who was in charge of Agrippa's guards invited his prisoner to dine with him.¹¹⁴ Yet, when Agrippa was released to house arrest after Caligula came to power, the instructions for this move were contained in a letter that was brought to the urban prefect, Lucius Calpurnius Piso. It appears that, as long as Agrippa was housed in the *Castra Praetoria*, he was in the charge of Macro, but the judicial responsibility continued to rest with the urban prefect.¹¹⁵

In the short reign of Caligula, there are only a few examples of the guard being used as executioners. One of the reasons for this is the absence of treason trials in the early part of the reign.¹¹⁶ Perhaps the most notorious incident concerned Tiberius Gemellus, who had been named co-heir with Caligula, but within a year of Caligula coming to power, had been killed. It is recorded that a

¹¹³ It may have been through the influence of Caligula that these concessions were granted; cf. Schwartz (1990), 55.

¹¹⁴ Josephus, *A*/ 18.228-233.

¹¹⁵ Durry (1938), 172; cf. also Nippel (1995), 95; Howe (1966²), 16, note 19: "There is, no doubt, some validity in the theory that the custom of sending prisoners to Rome and keeping them *militari custodia* would bring them under the control of the praetorian prefect, who would thus acquire a summary jurisdiction in criminal trials."

¹¹⁶ Cf. Barrett (1990), 64-5. They were reintroduced in AD 39; cf. Dio 59.16.8; 18.1-4; 23.8; Suetonius, *Caligula* 26.3. It is impossible to determine the level of involvement of the guard in these imprisonments and deaths, but given the nature of the incidents, it is likely that the praetorians would have had a role in many of them.

tribune of the guard was sent to ensure his death.¹¹⁷ It has been argued that, because Gemellus was a member of the imperial family, it was necessary for him to kill himself, since “it was *nefas* for anyone who had taken the oath to the emperor to harm him.”¹¹⁸ But there is no evidence that any officer of the praetorians refused to forswear his oath when ordered to kill a member of the imperial family. As we have seen, there seems to have been no hesitation in the execution of Agrippa Postumus in AD 14 and, in the decades to follow, soldiers will carry out their orders against the emperor’s relatives without question. In fact, Philo records that the tribune assigned to ensure Gemellus’ death had to help him because he did not know how to kill himself with the sword he was given, which is tantamount to participating in the actual death.¹¹⁹ The presence of the tribune from the emperor’s personal guard coupled with the absence of any announcement to the senate of Gemellus’ death, suggests it was intended that the incident would be kept quiet.¹²⁰

There are scattered references in the sources to instances during the reign of Caligula when the guard may have taken part in confinement and execution,

¹¹⁷ Suetonius, *Caligula* 23.3; Philo, *Legatio ad Gaium* 30-31. Cf. Barrett (1990), 75-6. Balsdon (1934), 37 notes the parallel with Agrippa Postumus’ murder.

¹¹⁸ Hurley (1993), 95. Cf. the words of Philo: ὡς οὐκ αὐτοκρατόρων ἀπογόνους πρὸς ἐτέρων ἀναιρεῖσθαι.

¹¹⁹ Grant (1974), 144 refers to “the professional etiquette of the military executioners”, in this case, that they could assist, but not do. Plass (1995), 94 points out that such action on the part of the person sent to ensure death blurs the distinction between execution and suicide.

¹²⁰ Dio 59.8.2.

but it is often difficult to be certain whether those involved are praetorians. One instance where a praetorian officer certainly did act as the agent was the execution of Marcus Aemilius Lepidus on Caligula's journey to Germany in AD 39. The emperor, accompanied by praetorians, went north apparently to suppress an emerging conspiracy involving Lepidus and Cornelius Lentulus Gaetulicus.¹²¹ It is impossible to determine the sequence of events which resulted in the deaths of the two alleged conspirators. We have few details about the elimination of Gaetulicus; it is reasonable that the guard was involved, in particular that the *speculatores* were used.¹²² Their service in this case would have allowed the removal of Gaetulicus without attracting undue attention. Seneca records that Lepidus was killed by a tribune named Dexter, undoubtedly an officer of the praetorians, perhaps the commander of the soldiers who were accompanying the emperor.¹²³ The use of the guard in these instances, then, was dictated by the high profile of the alleged conspirators, and the danger which they posed, given their military support; their elimination needed to be carried out quickly and quietly.¹²⁴

¹²¹ On the conspiracy, see Barrett (1990), 101-113. Cf. Suetonius, *Vespasian* 2.3; Dio 59.22.6-7. See also Simpson (1980), 347-366. Suetonius (*Caligula* 43) reports that the journey was made so quickly that the praetorians, against tradition, were forced to put their standards on their pack animals. The reason for this action is not given, though it has been suggested that the weight of the standards was slowing down the march. Cf. Hurley (1993), 160. On the speed of Caligula's journey, see Balsdon (1934), 17.

¹²² Cf. Barrett (1990), 105 who postulates that Gaetulicus was eliminated in Germany by "agents".

¹²³ Seneca, *Ep.* 4.7. Cf. Barrett (1990), 107.

¹²⁴ The grant of a donative after the death of Lepidus probably was made only to the praetorians with Caligula, if in fact the deed was done before reaching the army on the Rhine. Cf. Dio 59.22.7.

The guard was also involved in the case of Gaius Calpurnius Piso who was banished in AD 40. Dio records that he was allowed to take ten slaves with him, and when he asked for permission to take more, was told that he would have an equal number of soldiers.¹²⁵ It is also likely that members of the guard were with Agrippina Minor and Julia Livilla while they were in exile, given the previous examples of Agrippina Maior, Nero Caesar, and Agrippa Postumus, though there is no mention of soldiers in the sources.¹²⁶

Caligula himself is recorded to have delighted in observing the torture and executions of prisoners during lunch or celebrations.¹²⁷ Although such extreme measures were usually reserved for slaves, it had become the practice to torture those who had been accused of treason, and it is possible that the guard was involved in these cases. Suetonius adds that Caligula had a soldier who was a master at decapitation (*miles decollandi artifex*) execute those who were brought from the prison. Other incidents where praetorians may have played a role include the beating of the quaestor Betilienus Bassus during which the emperor is said to have spread clothing on the ground so that the soldiers could get a

¹²⁵ Dio 59.8.8. He is incorrect on his dating of the incident; see Barrett (1990), 77.

¹²⁶ Dio 59.22.8. On the banishment, cf. Barrett (1996), 69-70.

¹²⁷ Suetonius, *Caligula* 32.1; cf. also Seneca, *Dial.* 5.18.3-4 where Caligula is described as walking in the gardens of Agrippina as he watched the murders.

better footing, and the executions of men whose fathers were forced to attend or vice versa.¹²⁸

The assassination of Caligula, in which officers of the guard played a major role in the death of the emperor, differs from the other examples in that the praetorians acted of their own volition. During the planning of the deed, the praetorian tribune Chaerea voiced complaints about the use of the guard as torturer and executioner: τοὺς ὑπηκόους διακονούμεθα, δορυφόροι καὶ δῆμιοι καθεστηκότες ἀντὶ στρατιωτῶν . . . μαινόμενοι τῷ καθ' ἡμέραν αἵματι σφαγῆς καὶ βασάνου τῆς ἐκείνων.¹²⁹ Chaerea became one of the leaders in the conspiracy.¹³⁰ It also included three other tribunes of the guard: Cornelius Sabinus; a certain Papinius who is not otherwise known; and Iulius Lupus, who was related to the praetorian prefect, Clemens.¹³¹ The extent to which the plot

¹²⁸ Bassus: Suetonius, *Caligula* 26.3. Executions: Suetonius, *Caligula* 27.4; cf. also Dio 59.25.5b-7; Seneca, *Dial.* 5.18.3; 4.33.3-6. For elucidation of these incidents, see Barrett (1990), 156-158. For a similar incident during the reign of Augustus, cf. Suetonius, *Augustus* 13.2.

¹²⁹ Josephus, *AJ* 19.34; 42. The comment was directed to the praetorian prefect Clemens, and to Papinius, a fellow tribune.

¹³⁰ A story in Josephus seems to indicate that Chaerea was involved from the early stages of the conspiracy, for he was called upon to torture Quintilia, a woman closely associated with a fellow conspirator. Cf. Josephus, *AJ* 19.35-6; also briefly mentioned in Dio 59.26.4, and referred to, but without names, in Suetonius, *Caligula* 16.4. The torture took place in the palace, very near the emperor's quarters; cf. Wiseman (1991), 51. It is easy to imagine that being forced to undertake this action only added to Chaerea's anger; see Wiseman (1992), 1.

¹³¹ Cf. Demougin (1992), #420 (Sabinus); #421 (Lupus); #423 (Papinius). In addition, Clemens himself was approached by the conspirators, though he did not agree to participate directly, ostensibly because of his age; it is not known whether the other prefect had knowledge of the plot, but since the sources do not even record his name, if he was privy to it, he must have had an insignificant role. Wiseman (1991), 52; 69 suggests that Arruntius Stella was the other prefect based on *AJ* 19.148, but this is by no means certain. Cf. also Suetonius, *Caligula* 56.1; Dio 59.29.1.

spread among the rank and file is not certain, but its success shows that there were praetorians who could be trusted to assist their commanders and to forswear their oaths, perhaps through the promise of accelerated promotion in the guard or a substantial donative.

Caligula was killed in AD 41 at the games on the Palatine.¹³² Chaerea approached Caligula as he left the theatre, and asked him for the day's watchword. He attacked after receiving the reply.¹³³ There was no one to come to the emperor's aid except his litter-bearers, who were ineffective. During the actual assassination, most of the praetorians on duty that day on the Palatine (whether as protection for the emperor or as security for the games being held there) must have remained in the theatre, unaware of what was happening. That they did not attempt to get to the emperor or try to follow the assassins can probably be attributed to the efforts of the ex-consul Valerius Asiaticus, who seems to have been given the role of calming those in the theatre.¹³⁴ In fact, it

¹³² The choice of the place and time apparently was dictated by Caligula's intention to sail to Alexandria after the games; cf. Josephus *AJ* 19.80-83. See also Barrett (1990), 162-63, who points out that the crowd at the games would make it more difficult for the guard to protect Caligula when he was attacked. A further consideration had to be the ability of the conspirators to isolate Caligula from the rest of the praetorians and from the German bodyguard, both of which were supposed to protect him. This was made possible by the fact that Chaerea had to get the watchword from the emperor at the change of the guard; see Josephus, *AJ* 19.99; Suetonius, *Caligula* 58.

¹³³ In the version given by Suetonius (*Caligula* 58.2), it is Sabinus who asks for the watchword. It is possible that the change of the watch on the Palatine was to take place with the cohorts of Chaerea and Sabinus, which would have ensured that both of them would be close to the emperor. Hurley (1993), 198, note 113 remarks that Aquila, who landed the blow which killed Caligula, must have been a praetorian; if so, it is not known what rank he held.

¹³⁴ Cf. Dio 59.30.2: ἐπεὶ δὲ τὸ δορυφορικὸν ἐταράττετο καὶ διαθέοντες ἐπυνθάνοντο τὶς Γαίον ἔσφαζεν. Οὐαλέριος Ἀσιατικὸς ἀνὴρ ὑπατευκῶς θαυμαστὸν δὴ τινα τρόπον αὐτοὺς ἡσύχασεν. For Asiaticus' possible involvement in the conspiracy, see Barrett (1990), 162.

was the German bodyguard who first realized what had happened and who began to exact revenge.¹³⁵ They indiscriminately murdered anyone they happened upon and it was only with difficulty that they were prevented from wholesale slaughter by the supplication of the crowd still in the theatre and the admonitions of Arruntius Stella, though the number of praetorians present must have had an impact as well.¹³⁶

Members of the guard were involved not only in the murder of the emperor, contravening the oath which they had sworn to him, but also in the elimination of his family. One of the praetorian tribunes, Lupus, was sent immediately to kill Caesonia and her child.¹³⁷ He showed no hesitation in performing this task, according to Josephus, though technically they should have been protected by the same oath sworn to Caligula. After his accession, Claudius had both Chaerea and Lupus put to death.¹³⁸ It has been suggested that the

¹³⁵ Exactly where the Germans were at the time of the assassination is not clear. Although they should have been in close proximity to Caligula, it appears from Josephus' account that they had not exited the theatre with the emperor. Those guard members involved in the conspiracy may have played a role in keeping the *Germani corporis custodes* separated from Caligula.

¹³⁶ Josephus, *AJ* 19.119-126; 138-142; 148-152. Josephus describes the Germans as loyal to Caligula, partly because of the emperor's grants of money to them, and so bent on revenge. But see also chapter 215, where the Germans are described as having acted as they did because of their own savagery rather than out of any concern for public welfare. On the character of the German bodyguard, see Bellen (1981), 84-85.

¹³⁷ The choice of Lupus for such a task was to implicate his relative Clemens, according to Josephus (*AJ* 19.191); cf. Levick (1991), 37-8. Suetonius (*Caligula* 59) calls him a centurion of the guard. Balsdon (1934), 105 mistakenly attributes the murders of Caesonia and the child to the senate.

¹³⁸ Josephus, *AJ* 19.269; cf. Dio 60.3.4, Suetonius, *Claudius* 11.1, where a further reason for the execution of Chaerea is given, namely that he had advocated the murder of Claudius.

charge against them must have been the murder of Caesonia and Drusilla:

"Killing Gaius was justifiable tyrannicide . . . but going after the rest of the family (which included Claudius of course) was not . . ." ¹³⁹ Yet, Claudius must have viewed with trepidation the officers' contravention of their oath to protect the emperor, and the death of Chaerea in particular can be justified on the grounds that the new emperor wanted to let the guard know that he was not going to be next.¹⁴⁰ The executions were carried out by a man who seems to have been experienced in such things, for Chaerea is said to have been killed with the first blow.¹⁴¹ It is interesting that this task was carried out by a "soldier" (τὸν στρατιώτην) who is not recorded to have been an officer, one of the few specific examples we have in the sources of an ordinary guardsman performing this duty. According to Josephus, the executions took place in public.

Suetonius records that Claudius, during his reign, killed thirty-five senators and over 300 knights.¹⁴² The reasons for the elevated numbers are twofold: the re-introduction of treason trials and Claudius' own paranoia which

¹³⁹ Hurley (1993), 214.

¹⁴⁰ Cf. Levick (1990), 35.

¹⁴¹ Josephus, *AJ* 19.268-270; Dio 60.3.4; Suetonius, *Claudius* 11.1.

¹⁴² Suetonius, *Claudius* 29.2. Cf. also Dio 60.13 in which it is recorded that the number of public executions was so great that a statue of Augustus had to be removed from the area. The figure given in the *Apocolocyntosis* (14.2) for the number of *equites* is 221; Mottershead (1986), 120 comments that "the figures are remarkable and reveal that relations between Emperor and both senators and equites were strained." Cf. also Barrett (1996), 73; 104-5. For the references to executions in the *Apocolocyntosis*, see Baldwin (1964), 39-48.

was preyed on by those around him.¹⁴³ Though the total may be disputed, the evidence is overwhelming that there was a large number of deaths under this emperor, and the praetorians probably took part in most of them. For example, there is a case in Suetonius where a centurion reported to Claudius the death of an ex-consul; the emperor denied ever giving the order, but is said to have approved of the action because the soldiers had been vigilant in avenging him without instructions.¹⁴⁴

The incident involving Decimus Valerius Asiaticus in AD 47 illustrates the fear that Claudius felt. Charged with adultery and tampering with the army, he was arrested by the prefect of the guard, Rufrius Crispinus, who was accompanied by soldiers under heavy arms, as Tacitus puts it (*tamquam opprimendo bello*).¹⁴⁵ Asiaticus was returned in chains from Baiae to Rome and dealt with *intra cubiculum*. It is obvious from the way in which he was handled that Claudius took seriously the threat this man represented. Yet, according to Dio, Asiaticus almost escaped death, and would have done so had it not been for

¹⁴³ Cf. McAlindon (1956), 114: "... many condemnations, attributed to a multitude of causes, appear, when seen in their context, to have been at least understandable precautions and sometimes justifiable measures against treason, committed or contemplated." For example, there were many executions after the exposure of the conspiracy of Annus Vinicianus in AD 42; cf. Dio 60.15.6-16.3. Grant (1974), 154 suggests that there were at least six conspiracies planned during Claudius' reign.

¹⁴⁴ Suetonius, *Claudius* 29.2. See also Dio 60.14.2. The role of Claudius' freedman, Narcissus, in many of these deaths should not be overlooked. Cf. Seneca, *Apocolocyntosis* 13.4 where there is a list of those Narcissus had ordered executed. See also Baldwin (1964), 44.

¹⁴⁵ Tacitus, *Annals* 11.1.3. For further details, see Levick (1990), 61-64 (who refers to Asiaticus as "an active and athletic culprit" in an attempt to explain the excessive measures taken to arrest him); Scramuzza (1940), 93-97; Bauman (1974), 202-3.

Messalina. Acting through Lucius Vitellius, a member of the *consilium* which was hearing the charges, she remained insistent on his conviction.¹⁴⁶ Crispinus was rewarded well, being given one and a half million sesterces and an honorary praetorship, excessive compensation for an arrest.¹⁴⁷

The praetorians were called upon to act again in the affair with Messalina and Gaius Silius in AD 48.¹⁴⁸ After their "marriage" became known, Claudius, assisted by his inner circle, took quick action and members of the guard were dispatched to arrest those who had been in attendance.¹⁴⁹ The emperor himself was conveyed to the *Castra Praetoria* to reaffirm the loyalty of the praetorians.¹⁵⁰ They called out for retribution. By this time, several of those who had been present at the party had been brought to the camp by centurions of the guard. They were tried there by the soldiers (*parata contione militum . . . continuus dehinc cohortium clamor nomina reorum et poenas flagitantium*) and executed, including

¹⁴⁶ Dio 61.29.5-6. Whether the soldier who appeared to testify against Asiaticus was a member of the praetorians is not clear.

¹⁴⁷ Tacitus, *Annals* 11.4.3. Rudich (1993), 148 refers to Crispinus as "active in the prosecution of Valerius Asiaticus", but there is no evidence that the prefect actually took part in the proceedings.

¹⁴⁸ Tacitus, *Annals* 11.31-38; Suetonius, *Claudius* 26.2; 36.1; Dio 61.31.5. For analysis of the incident, see Levick (1990), 64-67; Bauman (1974), 177-88.

¹⁴⁹ Tacitus, *Annals* 11.32.1. Meise (1969), 161 postulates that there was a list of names of those who had attended the celebration which facilitated the quick arrests. Koestermann (1965), vol. 3, 102 argues that the soldiers in the camp had no knowledge of the affair, but this seems unlikely given the role of the praetorians in the apprehension of those involved.

¹⁵⁰ Tacitus, *Annals* 11.31.1. Bauman (1974), 180: "[The] view of the marriage as an act of usurpation is also implicit in the advice given to Claudius by his *consilium*, to go to the praetorian cohorts and ensure his safety before worrying about revenge." He later refers to the gathering of the troops as a "prearranged mass meeting", but it is possible that the cohorts responded of their own volition once word had got out.

Silius.¹⁵¹ By allowing the soldiers to have a say in the fate of those charged, the emperor provided them with the opportunity to reassert their loyalty.

The next step was the removal of Messalina. Tacitus records that Narcissus sent members of the guard – centurions and a tribune – to kill her.¹⁵² The order had come from the emperor himself, Narcissus said, and there is little reason to doubt the veracity of his claim.¹⁵³ Although Messalina tried to kill herself when she knew that there was no hope, she could not do it, and the tribune was forced to provide the final blow. It is reported that a former slave, Euodus, was sent along to make certain that the order was carried out.¹⁵⁴ This may indicate the uncertainty felt by Tigellinus over whether a praetorian officer would be willing to violate his oath of loyalty to the imperial family.¹⁵⁵ But there was no need for concern; like those soldiers who had killed Caesonia and

¹⁵¹ Tacitus, *Annals* 11.35.2. For the legal aspects of these “trials”, see Bauman (1974), 186-7. He points to the shortness of time in allowing for fourteen cases to have been heard and so assumes that there were “summary proceedings”. Dio (60.31.5) records that several people were arrested and tortured while Claudius was on his way back to Rome, but again, the restraints of time preclude such action.

¹⁵² Tacitus, *Annals* 11.37.2-3. Koestermann (1965), vol. 3, 105 notes that these officers were members of the palace watch, but since the other events had taken place in the camp, this is not absolutely certain.

¹⁵³ Nearly all the sources are in agreement on this aspect of the death of Messalina; cf. Suetonius, *Claudius* 26.2; Dio 60.31.5; Josephus *AJ* 20.149; *BJ* 249. Tacitus (*Annals* 11.37.1-2) insinuates that Narcissus gave the command, though the freedman attributed the command to Claudius (*ita imperatorem iubere*). Cf. also Bauman (1974), 185. Contra Oost (1958), 119.

¹⁵⁴ The words used of Euodus by Tacitus (*Annals* 11.37.2) are *custos et exactor*, the same as were used in 3.14.5 to describe the guard placed on Piso, which may add to the speculation that, in that case, the soldier was there simply as a guard.

¹⁵⁵ Or, it may indicate uncertainty over whether a guard member would obey an order coming from a freedman rather than from his commander.

Agrippa Postumus earlier, once the order had been given, the tribune did not hesitate to obey.¹⁵⁶ After Messalina's death, the senate honoured Narcissus with the *insignia quaestoria*, presumably for his role in the exposure of the affair.¹⁵⁷ There is no record of the reaction of the guard to the murder of the empress, but given the attitude of the praetorians to the trials in the camp, it is likely that they had little sympathy for her fate, if any.

Nero came to power in AD 54. In Tacitus' narrative, the first death recorded was that of Marcus Junius Silanus, governor of Asia. Interestingly, the guard was not involved in his death. He reputedly was killed instead by the procurator, Publius Celer, and a freedman, Helius. Tacitus refers to these men as *rei familiari principis in Asia*.¹⁵⁸ The reason why praetorians were not sent to carry out this execution was that the order apparently came from Agrippina, and Nero had not been told about her plans.¹⁵⁹ She also at this time was able to dispose of Narcissus, who had been placed in custody before the transition of power,

¹⁵⁶ Tacitus records that in the previous years there had been many executions ordered by Messalina herself. It is unknown whether the guard had been involved in these deaths. Cf. *Annals* 11.28.2: *multasque mortes iussu Messalinae patratas*. Among her victims was Julia Livilla, daughter of Germanicus, who had been exiled to Pandateria and by the end of AD 41, had been killed, possibly by a member of the guard. Cf. Dio 60.8.5; 18.4; Tacitus, *Annals* 13.32.5; Suetonius, *Claudius* 29.1; Levick (1990), 56.

¹⁵⁷ Tacitus, *Annals* 11.38.4. Messalina suffered *damnatio memoriae*; cf. Meise (1969), 161.

¹⁵⁸ Tacitus, *Annals* 13.1.1-3; cf. Dio 61.6.4-5.

¹⁵⁹ If Nero was not aware of the order, this episode may provide additional support for the argument against Agrippina's influence with the praetorians at this time, since she chose not to use them for what was an important execution. Bauman (1992), 191 argues that Agrippina could act unilaterally because she had shared authority over imperial procurators (based on Smallwood [1967], 264). Pliny (*NH* 7.58), however, attributes the death to Nero; cf. Baldwin (1967), 427; Barrett (1996), 153-55.

perhaps under the watchful eyes of the praetorians. He killed himself when threatened with execution, which leads to the speculation that, as in other cases, a soldier may have been sent to enforce his suicide.¹⁶⁰ Nero, who apparently knew nothing of the order, is recorded to have been upset by the freedman's death.

The sources indicate that the guidance of Burrus and Seneca prevented more deaths. Yet, they could not stop them all.¹⁶¹ In AD 55, Britannicus died, apparently murdered, though the evidence is controversial.¹⁶² According to Tacitus, the agent was the infamous poisoner Locusta, who had been imprisoned under Claudius. A praetorian tribune named Iulius Pollio had been assigned to watch over her, and it was to him that the arrangements were entrusted.¹⁶³ She may have been kept in the prison of the *Castra Praetoria*, given the status of the officer who was guarding her. Pollio is not mentioned in connection with this

¹⁶⁰ Tacitus, *Annals* 13.1.3; Dio 60.34.4-5. Cf. Faider (1929), 192.

¹⁶¹ Pliny (*Ep.* 5.5.3) notes that Gaius Fannius was writing a history of people put to death or banished by Nero, and that the unfinished work already amounted to three volumes. It is interesting that the most notorious murder of Nero's reign, that of his mother, did not involve the guard. In AD 59, when Nero decided to get rid of her, Anicetus, commander of the fleet at Misenum, provided the plan and undertook to carry it out. For details, see above, "Nero", 99-100.

¹⁶² The claim of murder is disputed. But, cf. Rogers (1955), 199; Griffin (1984), 73-4; Bauman (1974), 211. Barrett (1996), 172 notes that it was the perception that Nero had murdered Britannicus that was important, not whether the charge was true.

¹⁶³ Tacitus, *Annals* 13.15.3-16.1. It is possible that Pollio was from Narbonensis and an acquaintance of Burrus. Cf. Demougin (1992), #539. He also was associated with another praetorian tribune from the same area in an inscription from Annecy; cf. CIL 12.2545. Barrett (1996), 121 suggests Agrippina's involvement in Pollio's appointment. For the death of Britannicus, see also Suetonius, *Nero* 33.2-3, *Titus* 2; Dio 61.7.4; Josephus, *AJ* 20.153. Cf. Barrett (1996), 170-72; Bradley (1978), 197-99.

event in any of the other sources. The reason for the involvement of the tribune, if we accept Tacitus' version of the death, was a need for secrecy.¹⁶⁴ Who better to ensure that such a task was carried out quickly and quietly than an officer of the guard? Whether the incident occurred as recorded in Tacitus is not as important here as the purported role of the tribune; that such a responsibility would be attributed to an officer of the guard indicates that the involvement of praetorians in such deeds was an appropriate presumption. The official version – that Britannicus succumbed to a natural death – seems to have been widely accepted, if not completely believed.¹⁶⁵ There is no record of any response from the praetorians to this incident, but the absence of any donative to them after such a high profile death suggests that they accepted the official explanation. Pollio himself was promoted soon thereafter to the post of procurator of Sardinia; this “removed him *per speciem honoris* from the city where he might spread rumours among the guard or serve as a living reproach to the Emperor.”¹⁶⁶ It seems clear that his motivation for taking part in such a deed was personal gain, as had been the case for many officers in the past.

¹⁶⁴ Tacitus, *Annals* 13.18.1. Cf. Griffin (1976), 135. Clearly Nero did not want to risk any display of support for Britannicus coming from either the ranks of the guard or elsewhere.

¹⁶⁵ Cf. *AE* (1959), 224, from Amissus in Pontus, honouring Nero, Poppaea, and Britannicus, and dating to AD 63:

[Νέρωνα Κλαύδιον Καίσαρα Σεβαστὸν
Γερμανικόν, Σεβαστὴν Ποππαίαν, Τιβέριον
Κλαύδιον Βρεταννικόν, ὁ δῆμος διὰ τῆς
ἐπιμελείας Λουκίου Εἰουτίου Ποτεῖτου
καὶ τῶν συναρχόντων

¹⁶⁶ Griffin (1976), 88. Two inscriptions (CIL 10.7952 and 10.7863) from Sardinia record his tenure in the guard and in the urban cohorts.

In the year AD 62, there are several instances where the guard was used to arrest or execute those who were deemed a risk to the emperor.¹⁶⁷ The role of Tigellinus, by this time praetorian prefect, should not be overlooked in these cases. For example, he worked on Nero's fears of Rubellius Plautus to dispose of him, at this time in exile in Asia.¹⁶⁸ Soldiers were sent to kill him; it is claimed that there were sixty, a rather large number for such an undertaking.¹⁶⁹ Despite being warned in advance by one of his former slaves, Plautus refused to flee or to fight, and was killed by a centurion. It is recorded that a eunuch went along to observe the execution, which marks the second time that someone not associated with the military was in attendance to make sure that the job was done correctly, and it is suggestive of Tigellinus' lack of trust in the soldiers who had been sent.

One other incident in AD 62 should be noted. In the case of Octavia, Nero's former wife, the instigator of her downfall was not Tigellinus but Poppaea Sabina, the emperor's new wife. She first had Octavia's slaves tortured,

¹⁶⁷ Griffin (1984), 84 refers to "... the re-emergence of *maiestas* charges and the use of murder as a security measure, applied not merely to members of the imperial family but to possible rivals to the throne."

¹⁶⁸ Tacitus, *Annals* 14.58.2-59.2. Cf. Rudich (1993), 68-9. Plautus had been named in connection with the alleged conspiracy of Agrippina in AD 55, and exiled in 59; cf. Tacitus, *Annals* 13.20.1; 14.22. Connected with this execution in Tacitus is that of Faustus Cornelius Sulla Felix, in exile in Gaul, who was murdered at dinner by assassins, probably soldiers (*speculatores*?) since the order came from Tigellinus; cf. Tacitus, *Annals* 14.57.4; Rudich (1993), 67-8.

¹⁶⁹ Tacitus, *Annals* 14.58.4. Tacitus later (59.2) refers to these soldiers as a *maniple*, which usually consisted of two centuries. It is obvious that there is some confusion over the exact number, though it seems to be rather large.

under the direction of Tigellinus.¹⁷⁰ Koestermann argues that by using the prefect, Nero intended to give the impression of legality for this action, though there was no basis for the interrogation.¹⁷¹ Even though no incriminating information was forthcoming, Octavia was banished to Campania and placed under military guard.¹⁷² Before long, she had been moved to Pandateria and, within a few days, the command came for her death.¹⁷³ She was bound and killed; although it is not recorded in Tacitus who performed the deed, it likely was a soldier of her guard.

The Pisonian conspiracy of AD 65 provides several examples of the praetorians being involved in arrests and executions, often of their own colleagues. The details of the plot have been discussed elsewhere.¹⁷⁴ Tigellinus appears in the role of torturer, with his first victim being Epicharis, who earlier

¹⁷⁰ Tacitus, *Annals* 14.60.3; cf. Dio 62.13.4. See Griffin (1984), 111-2.

¹⁷¹ Koestermann (1965), vol. 4, 146. It should be recalled that Macro also had taken a personal interest in interrogations; see below, "The Guard in Civil Administration", 216-217.

¹⁷² Tacitus, *Annals* 14.60.5. Though it is not specified, this guard no doubt consisted of praetorians; cf. Rudich (1993), 69-74.

¹⁷³ Tacitus, *Annals* 14.64.1; cf. also Suetonius, *Nero* 35.2. Her exile before execution was necessary because of public opinion in Rome. Tacitus records that troops (probably the praetorian cohort which was on duty on the Palatine; cf. Koestermann [1965], vol. 4, 148) were used to disperse a crowd which had rioted and broken into the palace when they thought that Octavia had been restored to her previous position; cf. 14.61.1. See also Plass (1995), 98; Yavetz (1969), 15.

¹⁷⁴ See above, "Nero", 105-109. One may assume that a similar reaction followed the Vinician conspiracy in the next year, though there is little information in the sources; cf. Suetonius, *Nero* 36.2; Griffin (1984), 177-179. The murder of Corbulo and the Scribonii brothers that year also may be connected with this conspiracy. These men were summoned to Greece while the emperor was there, and executed. It is possible that the murders were carried out by the praetorians under the direction of Tigellinus. Cf. Dio 62.17.2-6; Bradley (1978), 221.

had been arrested under suspicion of being involved in a conspiracy. Other arrests followed, and the entire plan was revealed by two conspirators when they were faced with torture.¹⁷⁵ Tacitus records that the interrogation by Nero and Tigellinus was brutal (*saevae percunctationes*) and was supplemented by fierce attacks by Faenius Rufus, the prefect who himself was involved in the plot.¹⁷⁶ When executions were ordered of those implicated, it was guard members who were sent to carry out the command and, in the case of Piso himself, Nero trusted only new recruits to kill him, fearing that soldiers of long service might have declared for Piso already.¹⁷⁷ The consul Plautius Lateranus was killed by a tribune of the guard, Statius Proxumus; though his executioner was a fellow conspirator, Lateranus did not betray him.¹⁷⁸ The consul-designate, Marcus Iulius Vestinus Atticus, was given the order to kill himself by another tribune, Gerellanus, who took an entire cohort with him because of the threat that Nero perceived from Vestinus.¹⁷⁹ Tacitus describes Nero's amusement at the thought

¹⁷⁵ The two were Flavius Scaevinus and Antonius Natalis. Cf. Tacitus, *Annals* 15.56.1.

¹⁷⁶ Tacitus, *Annals* 15.58.3. The inquiries took place *intra cubiculum*, but the proceedings later were made public; *ibid.*, 73.1.

¹⁷⁷ Tacitus, *Annals* 15.59.4-5.

¹⁷⁸ Tacitus, *Annals* 15.60.1. Proxumus was pardoned by Nero but committed suicide.

¹⁷⁹ Tacitus, *Annals* 15.68.2-69.3. Nero's fear came from the personal guard which accompanied Atticus. Cf. Rudich (1993), 121. Whether, in fact, an entire cohort was sent or the term simply indicates a very large number of soldiers is uncertain.

of Vestinus' dinner companions surrounded by praetorians and not knowing what fate awaited them.¹⁸⁰

Of the conspirators who belonged to the praetorians, the tribune Subrius Flavus was executed by one of his colleagues, Veianus Niger. Tacitus records that Niger boasted to Nero of his brutality in carrying out the execution.¹⁸¹ Faenius Rufus was betrayed while interrogating Scaevinus (one of those who first had revealed the plot), and arrested by a soldier named Cassius, but details of the prefect's fate are not provided in the sources.¹⁸² Seneca also fell in the aftermath of the conspiracy, though whether he was personally involved is difficult to ascertain.¹⁸³ The initial interrogation was conducted by a tribune of the guard, Gavius Silvanus, who was among the conspirators, but the order to die was brought to Seneca by a centurion, for Silvanus could not bring himself to play the role of executioner.¹⁸⁴ Seneca's wife, Pompeia Paullina, intended to die with him, but was stopped by the soldiers who were still in the house. Clearly, Nero wanted to be kept informed of the events as they unfolded at the villa, and

¹⁸⁰ One is reminded of the circumstances of Libo in AD 16; see above, 148.

¹⁸¹ Tacitus, *Annals* 15.67.4; cf. Koestermann (1965), vol. 4, 314. A centurion named Sulpicius Asper also was executed, but it is not recorded who his executioner was; cf. 68.1. For discussion of Subrius Flavus and Sulpicius Asper, see Rudich (1993), 112-14.

¹⁸² Tacitus, *Annals* 15.66.1-2. Tacitus remarks only that he did not go to his death bravely; cf. 68.1.

¹⁸³ For discussion, see Rudich (1993), 106-112.

¹⁸⁴ Tacitus, *Annals* 15.60.4-61.4; cf. Dio 62.25.1-2 where the soldiers in attendance have to help Seneca commit suicide. Silvanus later was acquitted of any wrongdoing by Nero, but committed suicide; cf. Tacitus, *Annals* 15.71.2; Koestermann (1965), vol. 4, 300-301.

members of the guard were there to courier information to the palace, and to relay Nero's orders.¹⁸⁵

The remaining period of Nero's reign saw the guard involved in many other cases of surveillance and execution.¹⁸⁶ In AD 65, Lucius Iunius Silanus Torquatus was expelled from Rome under suspicion of conspiracy and confined in Bari where a centurion soon arrived to kill him.¹⁸⁷ Unlike other cases where the arrival of a soldier was enough to drive the accused to suicide, this time Silanus forced the soldier to do what he had been sent for. He put up a fight, but finally, having been subdued by the praetorians, was killed by the centurion. Tacitus adds that Silanus died as if in battle, wounded in the front. Others did not put up such a struggle. In AD 66, Marcus Ostorius Scapula was executed by a centurion of the guard when he was at his villa on the Ligurian border.¹⁸⁸ Nero took special care with the destruction of Ostorius for he was a renowned military man. Tacitus records the speed with which the action occurred, but nothing about the size of the force that was sent. Ostorius died without a fight, however. When he realized there was no escape, he killed himself.

¹⁸⁵ Rudich (1993), 112. It is likely that these soldiers were *speculatores*; how many of them would have knowledge of the conspiracy is not known.

¹⁸⁶ To the examples which follow should be added Rufrius Crispinus who was brought the order to die, most likely by an officer of the guard given his previous office as prefect (Tacitus, *Annals* 16.17.1-2); and Petronius who was arrested at Cumae and kept under house arrest, where he soon killed himself (Tacitus, *Annals* 16.18-19; for the role of Tigellinus in this case, see Rudich [1993], 156-7).

¹⁸⁷ Tacitus, *Annals* 16.9.1-2; cf. Rudich (1993), 139-140.

¹⁸⁸ Tacitus, *Annals* 16.15.1; cf. Rudich (1993), 146.

Throughout the Julio-Claudian period, then, there is evidence for members of the guard arresting and confining Roman citizens, both in their own homes and in the prison of the *Castra Praetoria*. The surviving information about arrests and imprisonment of the lower classes is scarce, but the responsibility probably fell to the urban cohorts, since the job of policing the city belonged to them. Praetorian officers appear to have participated in detention and imprisonment only in political cases which involved the nobility, and especially those who had any connection with the imperial family. It was partly for purposes of intimidation that these men were used, for the arrival of a soldier from the guard indicated to the accused that his fate was sealed, and often provided the catalyst for the victim's suicide.

The use of praetorians as executioners is consistent from Augustus through to Nero.¹⁸⁹ Although arrests and confinement may be viewed as an extension of the responsibility to ensure the safety of the emperor, the employment of members of the guard as executioners is not as easy to explain. Tiberius seems to have sent soldiers to ensure the suicides of those who had been charged under the treason law, but by the time of Nero, we find examples of people being forced to suicide or killed by the officer who had been sent by the

¹⁸⁹ It should be noted again that many of the cases in which prominent people were executed make no mention of the executioner, but in at least some of these, the guard would have been involved. See Appendix 4, "Confinement and Executions", 276-277.

princeps without sufficient reason for the death penalty to have been ordered.¹⁹⁰ The praetorians were compelled to carry out the wishes of the emperor, even if that should extend to killing members of the Roman nobility (including, on occasion, members of the imperial family). The job needed to be done quickly and efficiently and with a minimum of fuss, and the guard was at hand to do what was ordered without question and with little or no concern over the correctness, or legality, of its actions.¹⁹¹ But there is no obvious pattern to the executions committed by praetorian officers, though they do increase in frequency throughout the Julio-Claudian period, and it is not surprising to find the guard involved in executions after conspiracies in particular.¹⁹²

¹⁹⁰ Durry (1938), 279 argues that Nero was the one who “lowered the praetorians to the rank of police and even executioners”, but from the examples given, it seems that they had been used in this way from very early in their history.

¹⁹¹ It should be remembered that many of these tasks, in particular the more sensitive cases, probably were assigned to the *speculatores*.

¹⁹² I disagree with Millar (1977), 63, who comments on the difficulty in ascertaining which unit those soldiers functioning as executioners belonged to. It is the guard which is closest to the emperor and to which such a sensitive responsibility would be given. Cf. Nippel (1995), 93.

IX. The Guard in Civil Administration

The praetorians were involved in another area which was not directly related to serving as the emperor's bodyguard, and constituted what might be termed civil administration, such things as helping to fight fires, looking after public security at games and the theatre, tax collection, and construction projects. These responsibilities were similar to those of praetorian cohorts of provincial governors in the late republic, and probably were adapted from the administrative role of the soldiers at that time.¹ The period of civil war caused this aspect of the republican praetorian cohorts to be neglected in favour of their military function, but it should be remembered that in the first century BC, the direction which the employment of these cohorts seemed to be taking was towards increased involvement in administrative duties.

The praetorians seem to have been involved in such tasks as fire fighting or patrolling the games from very early on in their history. It is likely that Augustus soon realized that the employment of his personal guard in this way could be turned to his advantage. The presence of the soldiers at fires or the games was indicative that the emperor was taking a personal interest in these events, even if he himself was not there.

¹ See above, "The Guard in the Republic", 15-17.

Fires

The problem of fires in the ancient city of Rome had vexed its citizens for centuries. Under the republic, there was no formal system of fire fighting in place despite the fact that conflagration was such a common occurrence.² It is recorded in Plutarch that in the first century BC Crassus formed his own contingent of slaves and purchased buildings which were on fire or near the scene of a fire; there is, however, no mention of this group actually fighting the blazes.³

In 22 BC, after a particularly devastating inferno, Augustus instituted a corps of six hundred slaves who were given the responsibility of extinguishing fires and who were under the authority of the aediles. In 19 BC, they were ordered not only to put out the fires but also to prevent their outbreak.⁴ As Nippel points out, the organization of such a corps may have been “a reaction to the activities of the ambitious aedile Egnatius Rufus, who had achieved particular popularity by employing a privately recruited fire-fighting squad.”⁵ In 7 BC, after the city had been divided into fourteen regions, the command was transferred to the *vicomagistri* – four magistrates in each of the wards in Rome –

² See, for example, Johnstone (1992), 41- 57; Canter (1931-32), 270-88.

³ Plutarch, *Crassus* 2.

⁴ Dio 54.2; 53.24.4-5.

⁵ Nippel (1995), 96; cf. also Yavetz (1969), 96. Daugherty (1992), 229 notes that “once it had become obvious that the security of Rome and the security of the Princeps were synonymous, action was swift.”

but their fire duties were secondary to their main responsibility, which was the maintenance of cults, particularly those of the emperor.⁶

It was only in AD 6, after another fire had devastated many areas of the city, that Augustus finally incorporated the *vigiles*, a corps composed of freedmen, as a permanent and active fire-fighting force.⁷ The decision not to use freeborn men in this unit apparently was an effort to distinguish the *vigiles* as a non-military group. As Watson points out, "It is true that they were organized on a paramilitary basis but that they were regarded as milites . . . seems unlikely."⁸ The *vigiles* were divided into seven cohorts, each commanded by a tribune, with seven centuries per cohort. Overall control was assigned to a *praefectus vigilum*, chosen from the equestrian order.⁹ The number of cohorts was dictated by the divisions of the city; every cohort of *vigiles* was responsible for two of fourteen regions, with each region having its own watch-house or *excubitorium*, "depots for equipment and shelters for men out on patrol or

⁶ Dio 55.8.6.

⁷ Dio 55.26.4; Suetonius, *Augustus* 25.2; 30.1; Strabo 5.3.7; Appian, *BCiv* 5.132 (who has the incorrect date for the formation). Johnstone (1992), 56 sees the actions of Augustus as political: "[Augustus'] attempts to control fires are best understood not as technical or bureaucratic reforms, but as an aspect of political power." Cf. also Durry (1938), 18.

⁸ Watson (1967), 413. Cf. also Homo (1951), 178. The claim by Robinson (1992), 185 and note 85 that the *vigiles* twice were sent by Augustus to fight in battle is a misunderstanding of Suetonius, *Augustus* 25.

⁹ Daugherty (1992), 230 remarks on the scarcity of information about these prefects: "for the entire three centuries of the existence of the *cohortes* we know the names of 43 prefects, only seven of whom are ever mentioned by historians, and then for reasons other than firefighting."

fighting fires.”¹⁰ The total number of *vigiles* initially seems to have been around 4000, a considerable increase over the earlier contingent of slaves.¹¹ The large number attests to the difficulty of controlling fire in Rome.¹² Such an exigency also accounts for the continued involvement of the guard even after the creation of a specific unit to look after controlling blazes in the city.

Scholarly conjecture about the duties of the *vigiles* has them engaged not only in fighting fires but also in policing the city at night.¹³ But the evidence does not support this hypothesis, and it seems more likely that the night patrols were used for fire prevention rather than for maintaining order.¹⁴ “In an overcrowded city with a low technological standard of fire-fighting (which precluded the effective use of water) [the *vigiles*] would have been busy enough with their tasks as a fire brigade. . .”¹⁵ The technology available for combatting

¹⁰ Rainbird (1986), 148. Cf. Dio 57.19.6.

¹¹ For an estimation of the strength of the *vigiles*, see Rainbird (1986), 150-151. The number of men per cohort is not clear, but was either 560 or 1000. The difficulty in estimating their number comes from the late date of most of the evidence. By the third century, the *vigiles* numbered 7000 and much of our information - especially from inscriptions - comes from that period.

¹² Estimates put the number of fires in Rome at up to one hundred per day, with twenty of those being large and two serious; cf. Robinson (1992), 108 (citing Rainbird's 1976 unpublished dissertation). See Juvenal 3.197-202 on the dangers of fire in the crowded areas of the city. Cf. also Ramage (1983), 74-79.

¹³ Daugherty (1992), 231 and 238; Homo (1951), 176; Canter (1931-32), 287; Johnstone (1992), 61: “Augustus deployed the *vigiles* not just to fight fires, not just to patrol the dark nighttime streets, and not just to suppress riots, but to do all of these.”

¹⁴ Rainbird (1986), 151; cf. also Robinson (1992), 107. One might point to the appearance of the *vigiles* at Trimalchio's party: drawn by the noise, they broke down the door, not because of the disruption, but because they thought the house was on fire. Cf. Petronius, *Satyricon* 78.7.

¹⁵ Nippel (1995), 96-7.

conflagrations was limited and therefore a quick response was greatly advantageous to fighting any blaze. As well, since the rate of pay for the *vigiles* has been estimated to be less than half the annual amount of that of the urban cohorts (150 to 375 denarii), it is unlikely that they would have had similar responsibilities.¹⁶ It was the function of the urban cohorts to see to the safety of the city, and inevitably there would have been some overlap of duties as both groups patrolled the streets. While at times this would mean the *vigiles* rendering assistance to the urban cohorts, it by no means negates the necessity for the latter to be out at night as well, since the hazards of the night in Rome were considerable. Nero provides evidence for this when, disguised, he went wandering through the city causing disruption and himself came under attack. He always ensured that he had members of the praetorian guard with him after this incident.¹⁷ As Rainbird points out, "We do not need to seek an explanation for the large number of *vigiles* in anything other than firefighting. Even if they did have minor policing duties, their firefighting duties had to take priority as fire develops quickly. Their method of patrolling would probably appear police-like to the modern reader."¹⁸

¹⁶ For rates of pay, see Watson (1967), 414-15; Le Bohec (1994), 212. Although the exact numbers are controversial, the different estimates are all in agreement that the *vigiles* received much less than the urban cohorts.

¹⁷ Suetonius, *Nero* 26.1-2; Tacitus, *Annals* 13.25.1-3.

¹⁸ Rainbird (1986), 151.

Elsewhere in the empire, soldiers often were used to assist the local population in the control of fires.¹⁹ Despite the existence of the *vigiles*, this also was true in Italy where there are several examples of the praetorian guard being called upon to assist at conflagrations. Under Augustus, we know that praetorians were fighting blazes at Ostia; there is an inscription set up by the citizens there which honours a soldier of the guard who had died in such circumstances:

..... u | .. militi cohor. VI pr., | Ostienses locum
sepult. | dederunt | publicoque funere efferen. |
decrerunt | quod in incendio | restinguendo interit.²⁰

This inscription provides evidence that soldiers had been sent from Rome to aid in the suppression of the fire, perhaps to assist the *vigiles*.²¹ Durry, however, proposes the possibility that the sixth praetorian cohort may have been stationed in Ostia prior to being united with the other cohorts in Rome, though the evidence is tenuous.²² On at least one other occasion we know that cohorts were

¹⁹ Rainbird (1986), 153, note 13: "In general terms, soldiers should have been more effective than *collegia* because they were available full-time, they should have been better disciplined, they were available in larger numbers, and they were trained in the military use of and protection against fire." For an example of the army coming to the aid of civilians in a fire, see Safrai (1967), 226.

²⁰ CIL 14.4494 (=ILS 9494).

²¹ Durry (1938), 16 comments on the use of the *vigiles* in Ostia but without further discussion. It makes sense that only some of the *vigiles* were sent to Ostia and their number supplemented with other soldiers, since it would have been unwise to leave Rome completely unprotected.

²² Durry (1938), 44; cf. also Rainbird (1986), 157; Baillie Reynolds (1926), 110-1. There are four inscriptions which mention the sixth praetorian cohort in association with Ostia (CIL 14.215; 223; 4494; 4495) but 4494 is the only inscription securely dated to the period of Augustus. The ancient sources are divided on the issue of the billeting of the guard in and around Rome under Augustus; see Tacitus, *Annals* 4.2.1 (all nine cohorts in the city itself) and Suetonius, *Augustus* 49; *Tiberius* 37.1 (three cohorts in the city and the others scattered in the environs). See above, "Augustus", 25-26.

sent to Ostia from Rome when the emperor, this time Tiberius, saw a red glow in the sky.²³ It was, in fact, fear of fire in Ostia, and no doubt as well the inefficiency of sending men from Rome to the port, which finally prompted Claudius to establish a force, probably a cohort of *vigiles*, there permanently for the purpose of preventing outbreaks: *Puteolis et Ostiae singulas cohortes ad arcendos incendiorum casus collocavit*.²⁴

In Rome itself, the guard was involved in fighting most of the major fires which occurred during the reign of the Julio-Claudians.²⁵ Suetonius records that, in the reign of Tiberius, Livia was present at a fire which was near the Temple of Vesta, encouraging both the citizens and the soldiers (*populum et milites*) to work harder in their efforts. She apparently had done the same sort of thing under Augustus.²⁶ *Milites* here must refer to a force other than the *vigiles*, who were generally not considered soldiers, and it is likely that the praetorians are meant,

²³ Seneca, *Quaest. Nat.* 1.15: *sub Tiberio Caesare cohortes in auxilium Ostiensis coloniae cucurrerunt tamquam conflagentis* . . . It is not clear whether these men were from the guard or the *vigiles*, or maybe a combination of the two.

²⁴ Suetonius, *Claudius* 25.2. The type of cohort is not identified, but Murison (1993), 128, note 32, and Daugherty (1992), 231 both argue for detachments of *vigiles*. Contra Durry (1938), 12, note 6 who suggests it was an urban cohort. Rainbird (1986), 157, in agreement with Durry, notes that it was removed by Otho (cf. Tacitus, *Histories* 1.80-82), and suggests that it may have been under Vespasian that the cohort returned, though there is a gap in the evidence until the time of Domitian. It should be noted, however, that in none of the ancient texts is the type of cohort ever specified and, in fact, Grant (1974), 156 refers to it as a "naval detachment."

²⁵ Werner (1906), 46 records 11 serious fires between AD 6 and 68. Many of these would have involved the praetorians, though the soldiers are not always mentioned, as in the fire of AD 27 which gutted the Caelian Hill. Cf. Tacitus, *Annals* 4.64.1; Velleius Paterculus, *Histories* 2.130.2.

²⁶ Suetonius, *Tiberius* 50.3.

in particular those who would have been Livia's regular escort in the city.²⁷

According to Dio, Drusus, the son of Tiberius, also was accompanied by

praetorians when he went to give aid at a blaze in AD 15, though the report of

his assistance is very uncomplimentary: νυκτὸς ἐμπρησθεῖσιν τισιν ἐπικουρῆσαι

μετὰ τῶν δορυφόρων ἀναγκασθεῖς.²⁸ The aid of the praetorians is not commented

on, but it is probable that they took part in the fire-fighting process, rather than

simply acting as protection for the emperor's son. The guard must have been

present at the fire of AD 22 during which the Theatre of Pompey was destroyed.

Tacitus records that, after the prefect had been praised by the emperor, the

senate granted Sejanus a statue in the theatre in recognition of his actions in

containing the flames.²⁹ This distinction was not favourably received.³⁰ Velleius

Paterculus, in his brief account of the fire, does not mention Sejanus at all, which

may indicate that the later sources have misinterpreted the gesture of the statue

²⁷ Although Dio on one occasion (62.17.1) refers to the *vigiles* as στρατιῶται, the fact that he includes a parenthetical comment in which he distinguishes the other στρατιῶται from the νυκτοφύλακες indicates that there was some ambiguity even in antiquity about the "military" nature of the unit.

²⁸ Dio 57.14.10.

²⁹ Tacitus, *Annals* 3.72.3; cf. Dio 57.21.3 who remarks that this recognition was unusual, since Tiberius previously had honoured other men with statues only after their deaths. Levick (1976), note 63 comments on the praise for Sejanus as perhaps being "an implied criticism of Drusus' conduct at a fire", in reference to the blaze of AD 15.

³⁰ Seneca (*Cons. ad Marc.* 22.4) records the reaction of Cremutius Cordus to the statue: *exclamavit Cordus tunc vere theatrum perire*.

as evidence of the growing power of the prefect rather than as an honour for his role in helping to contain the fire.³¹

Sometimes even the emperors are recorded as being present at the fires. It is recorded that Tiberius gave aid to fire victims, and early in his reign, Caligula is said to have helped extinguish a blaze and to have been aided in this by soldiers (μετὰ τῶν στρατιωτῶν).³² These are probably the praetorians, given their presence at earlier fires, in attendance not merely as protection for the emperor but rather to take an active role in fighting the flames. A group of soldiers (*turba militum*) also accompanied Claudius to a fire at which he stayed for two days.³³ Mottershead includes in this crowd “detachments of Vigiles, Urban Cohorts and possibly Praetorian Cohorts . . .”³⁴ He argues that the urban cohorts would have been necessary to maintain order, and that the praetorians were present simply to guard the emperor. Yet it is more likely, since the fire raged for two days, that as many cohorts as were available in Rome would have participated in

³¹ Velleius Paterculus, *Histories* 2.130.1. It could also be the case that the presence of the praetorians and their prefect at fires was so accepted by this time that no mention need be made of them.

³² *Tiberius*: Dio 57.16.2; Tacitus, *Annals* 6.45. *Caligula*: Dio 59.9.4; cf. Durry (1938), 278.

³³ Suetonius, *Claudius* 18.1; cf. Dio 60.33.12. Agrippina was with Claudius; cf. Barrett (1996), 130. Levick (1990), 112 argues that Claudius had learned from Sejanus the “political capital” which could be gained by personal attention to the fighting of fires, but it seems more likely that he was just following the tradition set by his predecessors.

³⁴ Mottershead (1986), 73.

combatting it, especially since Claudius is said to have paid as well for the services of the plebs to fight the blaze.³⁵

In the accounts of the great fire of AD 64, the role of the praetorians is not clearly defined. Given their participation in those fires noted so far, however, they must have been present at such a disaster. The sheer size of the blaze, it seems, should have made their assistance necessary: “Though Rome was regularly subject to fires as a consequence of overcrowding, timber construction, and inadequate fire-fighting apparatus, there was nothing routine about this blaze. It broke out in the early hours of 19 July and lasted for six days, only to be renewed for a further three days: it effectively levelled three of the fourteen regions . . . leaving only four untouched.”³⁶ Yet, there is virtually nothing recorded in the sources about the attempts made to fight the fire. A reference in Dio, however, does hint at a somewhat malevolent involvement of “soldiers”:

καὶ πολλοὶ μὲν οἴκοι ἔρημοι τοῦ βοηθήσοντός σφισιν ἀπώλοντο, πολλοὶ δὲ καὶ ὑπ’ αὐτῶν τῶν ἐπικουρούντων προσκατεπρήσθησαν· οἱ γὰρ στρατιῶται, οἳ τε ἄλλοι καὶ οἱ νυκτοφύλακες, πρὸς τὰς ἀρπαγὰς ἀφορῶντες οὐχ ὅσον οὐ κατεσβέννυσάν τινα ἀλλὰ καὶ προσεξέκαιον.³⁷ It is impossible to determine who exactly is meant by οἱ στρατιῶται, though the parenthesis, οἳ τε ἄλλοι καὶ οἱ

³⁵ Cf. Canter (1931-32), 275 who refers to the inability of the “regular firemen” to manage the fire.

³⁶ Griffin (1984), 129. Robinson (1992), 108 notes that the fire “seems to have created a fire-storm”, and quotes Rainbird that the odds of such a conflagration were one in eleven million.

³⁷ Dio 62.17.1. Cf. also Suetonius, *Nero* 38.1; Tacitus, *Annals* 15.38.7: *nec quisquam defendere audebat, crebris multorum minis restinguere prohibentium, et quia alii palam faces iaciebant atque esse sibi auctorem vociferabantur.*

νυκτοφύλακες, must indicate members of the guard in addition to the *vigiles*. But whether the purpose of these soldiers was as sinister as traditionally had been thought has recently been questioned. From the report of the event in Tacitus, it is clear that someone was trying to combat the fire: *incendium . . . anteiit remedia*.³⁸ Daugherty has suggested that what the soldiers were doing was creating a firebreak to stop the spread of the blaze: "The accounts of Dio, Tacitus, and Suetonius reflect active efforts at fire suppression by one of the few effective methods open to firefighters of the day: containment by demolition or backfire."³⁹ The fact that the "counter-fires" were started on Tigellinus' property is presented as additional evidence for this idea; as former commander of the *vigiles*, the praetorian prefect would have had experience of how to handle problem fires.⁴⁰ The efforts of the *vigiles* and the guard (and probably also of the urban cohorts) to fight the fire, then, has been misrepresented by anti-Neronian sources which portrayed the emperor as the cause of the disaster.⁴¹ The rumour that Nero had set the fire himself emerged in that same year, and is recorded by

³⁸ Tacitus, *Annals* 15.38.3.

³⁹ Daugherty (1992), 233; cf. also 234. Robinson (1992), 109 notes that "even nowadays demolition to create a fire-break is the only effective method of quelling a really serious fire."

⁴⁰ *Counter-fires*: Tacitus, *Annals* 15.40.2. Daugherty argues that Tigellinus was in charge of the fire-fighting process in the absence of the prefect of the *vigiles*, the office being vacant or held by an inexperienced commander, but offers no further evidence. His assumption that many of the officers of the *vigiles* would have moved to the guard with Tigellinus, leaving the unit without many knowledgeable commanders, is not defensible, since such a move would go against the usual method of promotion through the ranks of the Rome cohorts.

⁴¹ Daugherty (1992), 233: "Historical accounts which were following this anti-Neronian line clearly skewed their versions of the fire to reflect as badly as possible on the emperor and any of the efforts he took to deal with the fire and its aftermath."

the elder Pliny, Suetonius and Tacitus, among others.⁴² Thus, what seems at first to be inhibition of the fire-fighting process – preventing people from trying to save their property and setting new fires in the area – in fact may have been the only remedy available to fight such a large blaze. After the conflagration had finally been extinguished, it is recorded that Nero made an effort to ensure that another fire of these proportions would not occur.⁴³

Johnstone notes that “the Romans left no comprehensive record of fires in their city. Our knowledge of them must be culled from incidental references in literature and, most especially, brief citations in histories . . . fires which concerned powerful men, consumed public buildings, or impinged on the state were most likely to be reported.”⁴⁴ It is not surprising, then, that the examples of blazes under the Julio-Claudians which are recorded in the sources are only those of the greatest significance. The presence of the praetorian guard at many of these fires, however, does not seem fundamentally to be related to the task of protecting the emperor, and therefore, an additional reason for their attendance must be sought. It is true that, by early in the second century AD, a career pattern had been established for the cohorts in Rome, and promotion, at least at

⁴² Pliny, *NH* 17.5; Tacitus, *Annals* 15.38.1; Suetonius, *Nero* 38.1. Cf. also Statius, *Silvae* 2.7.60-61; *Octavia*, 831-33; Dio 62.16.1-2.

⁴³ Tacitus, *Annals* 15.43. On the social and economic impact of the fire, see Newbold (1974), 858-69.

⁴⁴ Johnstone (1992), 52-3.

the level of centurion and tribune, generally meant moving from the *vigiles* to the urban cohorts to the guard.⁴⁵ It is possible that this *cursus* could have provided some of the praetorians with experience in fire-fighting techniques, and may help to explain their participation alongside the *vigiles*. It should be noted, however, that the evidence from inscriptions for the average soldier is rather scarce.⁴⁶ An example of what was to become a typical career for an officer in the first half of the second century is that of Gaius Arrius Clemens:

C. Arrio C. f. Corn. | Clementi militi coh. IX | pr.,
equiti coh. eiusdem, donis | donato ab imp.
Traiano | torquibus armillis phaleris | ob bellum
Dacicum, singulari | pr[a]efectorum pr., tesserario,
op | tioni, fisci curator, cornicul. | tribuni, evocato
Aug., (centurioni) coh. I vigil., (centurioni) | statorum,
(centurioni) coh. XIII urb., (centurioni) coh. VII pr., |
trecenario, donis donato ab. imp. | Hadriano hasta pura
corona aurea, | (centurioni) leg. III Aug., primipilari,
IIviro quin | quennali, patrono municipi, | curator rei
publicae, | decur. et Aug. V[I *vir.*] municipes Matil.⁴⁷

⁴⁵ See Dobson and Breeze (1969), 107. It is not clear how long each post was held. Though Dobson (1974), 418 had suggested that one year was the norm, he later (1982), 327 argued that, before Claudius, men could have served for longer. It is more likely that promotions were flexible. Cf. Devijver (1970), 79.

⁴⁶ On the promotion of men below the rank of the centurionate to junior offices in the cohorts in Rome, see Breeze (1974a), 436–441. It appears from inscriptions that each unit followed a similar pattern in these promotions, but there is little evidence for movement from one unit to the other at this level until after the Julio-Claudian period. See, for example, CIL 6.2558 (=ILS 2036), dating to AD 69.

⁴⁷ CIL 11.5646 (=ILS 2081). Translated in Campbell (1994), #91 who notes that this career is “fairly typical of the more elaborate second century pattern of promotion to the centurionate from the guard. . .” Other examples include Lucius Velius Prudens (CIL 11.7093a=ILS 2081), Lucius Arbustius Valentinus (CIL 14.4007), Marcus Bassaeus Rufus (CIL 6.1599=ILS 1326), Tiberius Claudius Secundinus (CIL 5.867=ILS 1339), and Quintus Petronius Modestus (CIL 5.534=ILS 1379).

Clemens began his career as a soldier in the ninth praetorian cohort, moving to the cavalry of the same unit, and after decoration for service in the Dacian War, progressed through several junior posts. After reaching the status of an *evocatus*, he proceeded to the centurionates, first of the *vigiles*, then of the *statores* (imperial messengers), next of the urban cohorts, and finally of the praetorian guard, the usual progression for soldiers who began their service in Rome.⁴⁸ The stint in the Rome centurionates often preceded a move to a legion as centurion, a pattern which Clemens followed; he even managed to reach the primipilate, though he advanced no further.⁴⁹

For the first century AD, however, the evidence is too incomplete to be able to state with any conviction that the same career pattern was followed. As Dobson and Breeze point out, "in epigraphic terms career records of the guard come in a sudden burst under Trajan and Hadrian after a few scattered examples in the first century."⁵⁰ We do know of men who moved from the *vigiles* to the guard, but these inevitably are officers and not common soldiers. This inequity

⁴⁸ Dobson and Breeze (1969), 100-117. In the imperial period, *evocati* referred to soldiers who stayed on after the completion of their service, or who were invited to remain, and did so willingly (in the republic, the term generally referred to those who were forced to do further service).

⁴⁹ For discussion of such careers, see Birley (1961), 118-122. Dobson and Breeze (1969), 101-2 note that the progression for an *evocatus* of the guard was never from the legionary centurionates to the Rome centurionates; only men directly commissioned to the position of centurion in the legions were promoted in this way, and even then, seem never to have served as centurion in the *vigiles*. It is possible that Claudius regularized the career pattern; cf. Demougin (1988), 742, with note 240.

⁵⁰ Dobson and Breeze (1969), 115. Although they are focussing on the centurionate, the same seems to hold true for other ranks as well. For the tribunes of the guard, see Dobson (1974), 418.

could be a result of the continued use of freedmen in the *vigiles* in the first century, whereas the officers came from the Rome cohorts or the legions.⁵¹ The following are examples of three careers from the first century:

L. Tatinio. | L. f. Vol. Cnoso | militi cohortis IIII
pr. | singulari et benef. trib. | optioni benef. pr. pr.
evoc. | Aug. donis donato tor | quibus armillis phaler. |
corona aurea [*ab imp. Do* | *mitiano Caes. Aug. Germ.*] |
(centurioni) cohort. IV vigil. (centurioni) stat. |
(centurioni) cohort. XI urbanae | veterani qui sub eo
in vigilib. | militaver. et honesta mis | sione missi sunt.⁵²

Lucius Tatinius Cnosos began his career as a soldier of the fourth praetorian cohort and then progressed through the usual sequence of junior posts before reaching the stage of *evocatus*. His service in Rome included only the centurionates of the *vigiles*, the *statores*, and the urban cohorts, though one can assume that the next step would have been the centurionate in the praetorian guard.⁵³ The inscription was set up by those who had served under Cnosos in the *vigiles*, a tribute to the command which he had held.

The second example is Lucius Antonius Naso:

[L.] Antonio M. f. Fab. Nasoni | [(centurioni) le] g.
III Cyrenaicae | [(centurioni) le] g. XIII Geminae, |

⁵¹ Durry (1938), 18. The *lex Visellia* of AD 24 granted citizenship to those who had served in the *vigiles* for six years (later reduced to three years) and, after becoming citizens, they could advance through the ranks to the other Rome cohorts. Cf. Homo (1951), 182. de Visscher (1966), 764-66 argues that Macro was instrumental in getting this law enacted.

⁵² AE 1933, 87. Cf. Breeze (1974a), 436.

⁵³ In between the assignment as centurion of the *vigiles* and that of the urban cohorts, Cnosos held the centurionate of the *statores*, which is a very obscure post. The *statores* were imperial messengers.

[*honorat*]o albata decursione ab imp., | [*praef.*] civitatis Colophianorum, | [*primo*] pilo leg. XIII Gem., | trib. leg. I Italic., | [*trib. coh.*] IIII vigilum, | trib. coh. XV urban | [*trib. coh.*] XI urban., | trib. coh. IX prae[t. | *donato*] ab imperator[*e Nerone co*]ron. [*valla*]ri, corona au[*rea*] | vexillis [*duob*]us, ha[*stis puris*] du[a]bus | [*primo pilo bis le*]g. XIV Gem., | [*trib. coh.*] I praet., | et pra[*ep*]osito supra | [*vetera*]nos Romae m[o]rantium [*pluriu*]m exercituum, | proc. Aug. [*Po*]nto et B[*ithyni*]ae.⁵⁴

Naso, who had a very distinguished career, began as a centurion in the legions and reached the primipilate before becoming tribune of the I Italica.⁵⁵ He then was promoted to the tribunates of the Rome cohorts, beginning with the *vigiles*. His successive posts in the urban cohorts (that of the XV urban in Puteoli) were a rare occurrence, perhaps explained by the turbulent events of AD 68. The repetition of the praetorian tribunate after being *primus pilus* for a second time also is explained by the strange events of AD 69, when Naso fell in and out of favour as the emperors changed. His assignment as commander of the veterans in Rome was unusual as well, but resulted from the civil wars of AD 69 and shows the great confidence which Vespasian had in him.⁵⁶

The third example is provided by Gaius Gavius Silvanus:

⁵⁴ CIL 3.14387 (=ILS 9199); Pflaum (1960), #36; Demougin (1992), #703. Translated by Campbell (1994), #95.

⁵⁵ Demougin (1992), 598 points out that this promotion was surprising since the office of legionary tribune had been reserved for those of equestrian status from the time of the reforms of Claudius. The appointment of Naso to this post perhaps was made necessary because the I Italica was a new legion created by Nero and it needed officers.

⁵⁶ Pflaum (1960), 86 places this responsibility at the same time as the office of tribune of the praetorian guard, and records a suggestion by Birley that these veterans were to be settled in Reate. Cf. also Demougin (1992), 599.

C. Gavio L. f. | Stel. Silvano, | [p]rimipilari
 leg. VIII Aug., | [t]ribuno coh. II vigilum, |
 [t]ribuno coh. XIII urban., | [t]ribuno coh. XII
 praetor., | [d]onis donato a divo Claud. | bello
 Britannico | [to]rquibus, armillis, phaleris, | corona
 aurea, | [p]atrono colon., | d. [d.]⁵⁷

Silvanus, who had reached the status of *primus pilus* in the legions, was promoted to the tribunate of the *vigiles* and then moved through the urban cohorts to the praetorian tribunate.⁵⁸ It is thought that he was a centurion of the guard when he accompanied Claudius to Britain, but his earlier career is omitted from the inscription, although the decoration by the emperor is included.⁵⁹ Silvanus later was involved in the Pisonian conspiracy against Nero, and committed suicide.⁶⁰

One of the best known careers from the Julio-Claudian period is that of Marcus Vettius Valens:

M. Vettio M. f. Ani. | Valenti | mil. coh. VIII pr.,
 benef. praef. pr., | donis donato bello Britan. |
 torquibus, armillis, phaleris, | evoc. Aug., corona
 aurea donat., | (centurioni) coh. VI vig., (centurioni)
 stat., (centurioni) coh. XVI urb., (centurioni) coh. |
 II pr., exercitatori equit. speculatorum, princip. |
 praetori leg. XIII Gem., ex trec. [p. p.] leg. VI | Victr.,
 donis donato ob res prosper. | gest. contra Astures
 torq. phaler. arm., | trib. coh. V vig., trib. coh. XII

⁵⁷ CIL 5.7003 (=ILS 2701); cf. Demougin (1992), # 574.

⁵⁸ On the question of the location of the XIII urban cohort, see Bérard (1988), 174-5.

⁵⁹ Demougin (1992), 477. The argument in favour of the centurionate is based on Silvanus attaining the primipilate of the VIII Augusta.

⁶⁰ Tacitus, *Annals* 15.50; 60-61; 71.

urb., trib. coh. | III pr., [p. p. II] leg. XIII Gem. Mart.
 Victr., | proc. imp. [Neroni] Caes. Aug. prov. Lusitan., |
 patron. coloniae, speculator. X h. c., | L. Luccio Telesino
 C. Suetonio Paulino cos.⁶¹

Valens clearly had an unusual and illustrious career, for he went from the ranks of the guard under Tiberius to hold an imperial procuratorship under Nero.⁶² He was decorated by Claudius for his service in Britain as *beneficiarius* to the praetorian prefect Rufrius Pollio, and was awarded a *corona aurea* after reaching the status of *evocatus*.⁶³ He then held centurionates in Rome, moving from the *vigiles* to the *statores*, the urban and praetorian cohorts, after which he held the position of drillmaster (*exercitator equit [um]*) of the *speculatores*. The assignment as *trecenarius*, which preceded his stint as *primus pilus* of the VI Victrix in Spain, indicates his tenure as the centurion in charge of the *speculatores* of the guard.⁶⁴ After receiving equestrian status, he came back to Rome to hold successive tribunates and then held the primipilate for a second time. Finally, he became

⁶¹ CIL 11.395 (=ILS 2648); Pflaum, #32; Demougin (1992), #588. Translated by Campbell (1994), #90. Cf. also Syme (1958), 183, note 4. Barrett (1996), 119-120, like Durry (1938), 132-33, is incorrect in his attribution of Valens' centurionate to the XVI *vigiles*. Durry also omits the tribunates of the *vigiles* and the urban cohorts, without comment.

⁶² Syme (1939), 244 notes that Valens may have been related to Claudius' doctor, Vettius Valens, which could account for his prominence at court.

⁶³ Durry (1938), 133. Demougin (1992), 488, note 2 suggests that this honour may have been given in AD 48 for service to Claudius during the Messalina affair.

⁶⁴ On the *speculatores*, see above, "The Guard as a Specialized Military Unit", 135-141. The appointment as *primus pilus* was conjectured by Mommsen and followed by Pflaum and Demougin, among others. But cf. Picard and Le Bonniec (1937), 119-121 for a different interpretation of the lacuna (reading *princeps praetorii*); they also suggest that the position held in the XIII legion was tribune, not *primuspilus bis*.

procurator for Nero in Lusitania. Such a career is unusual, however, for the cumulation of offices plus the further promotion after reaching the primipilate for the second time are rare events.⁶⁵

Given the paucity of information on the movement of soldiers from the *vigiles* to the praetorians in the first century, then, it is impossible to determine whether members of the guard were employed to fight fires at this time because they had previous experience as *vigiles*. Another explanation for the use of praetorians to combat blazes in Rome and the surrounding area is that of practicality: the guard was present in the city in large numbers, and was personally employed by the emperor. Since he was seen as responsible for the welfare of the state, it is perhaps not all that surprising that his private bodyguard would be called upon to assist when the city was threatened. The *vigiles*, though numerous, no doubt required assistance, especially at larger blazes, and since it is these which we find recorded in the ancient sources, it is no accident that the praetorians (and probably also often the urban cohorts) are present as well.⁶⁶ Johnstone, remarking on the presence of the praetorians at three of these fires under the Julio-Claudians, concludes that “fire fighting . . .

⁶⁵ Valens is the first soldier from the ranks of the guard to achieve such a promotion for whom we have evidence. Cf. Demougin (1992), 487; Birley (1961), 118; Syme (1958), 183, note 4. Durry (1938), 134, however, calls this career “typical”.

⁶⁶ One might adduce a modern parallel in this context, for even today at fires which threaten a large area, and especially those which threaten residential communities, the army is occasionally brought in to supplement those fire-fighters employed by the state.

was not so specialized that other troops could not do it effectively. . . any might fight fires, all asserted the emperor's substantial presence."⁶⁷

Security at the Games

Spectacles were of major importance to the ancient Romans. Under the empire, these events included the theatre, the arena, and the circus; the latter two were venues for gladiatorial combat and beast hunts and, in the case of the circus, horse-racing. During the period of the Julio-Claudians, the number of days on which spectacles were held averaged roughly 90; they steadily increased throughout the imperial period.⁶⁸ With the population of Rome at this time estimated to be close to one million, the need for security at such events was considerable.⁶⁹ Yet the question of who was responsible for maintaining order at these venues is a difficult one to answer. It is often impossible to identify the units of soldiers who performed this service because of the imprecision of the terms used in the sources.⁷⁰ But *milites* to Roman ears undoubtedly would have been interpreted as designating the most visible and concentrated force in Rome, namely the praetorians. Certainly, by the second century, the urban prefect was in charge of the security at the games and this has been interpreted to mean that

⁶⁷ Johnstone (1992), 60-1.

⁶⁸ Balsdon (1969), 248; Olivová (1984), 174.

⁶⁹ *Population estimate*: Freis (1967), 41; Robinson (1992), 8.

⁷⁰ Millar (1977), 63.

he used the urban cohorts for this purpose, since they were under his command. It is not clear, however, whether they also were engaged in this way under the earlier emperors.⁷¹ Upon examination of the evidence for the first half of the first century, it would seem that there is another, more plausible, possibility. Under the Julio-Claudians, the praetorians are described as being present at the spectacles, both the theatre and the games, for the purpose of policing.⁷² By the end of the first century, there was a detachment of soldiers that maintained order at the Colosseum, so it is not surprising to find the praetorians used in a similar way much earlier, not only at the games but also at the theatre.⁷³

We know that soldiers attended the games as spectators, and that on at least one occasion, their presence almost proved fatal to the future emperor Augustus. In 41 BC, he ordered a soldier to be removed from the games for sitting in the rows of seating reserved for *equites*. When a rumour started that the man had been tortured and killed, Suetonius records that an indignant mob of soldiers attacked Octavian, and he was only saved by the reappearance of the

⁷¹ Cadoux (1959), 158, however, asserts that this responsibility belonged to the urban prefect "from the beginning" and provides Ulpian, *Digest* I,12,1,12 as evidence. Cf. Freis (1967), 44-45; Wiedemann (1992), 176; Robinson (1992), 197-8; Balsdon (1934), 266. Yet one cannot use third century evidence to illustrate practices in the first century.

⁷² Many commentators accept the presence of the guard without further comment: cf. Durry (1938), 278; Koestermann (1965), vol. 1, 249, who notes only that a unit of praetorians was at the games to rein in the crowd; Grant (1974), 15: "It had long been customary [by the time of Nero] for a cohort to maintain order at the games."; Garnsey and Saller (1987), 158: "To prevent vocal protest from developing into a riot, the presence of a praetorian cohort became a regular function of public spectacles."

⁷³ *Colosseum*: Scobie (1988), 219.

soldier who had been evicted.⁷⁴ Augustus later decided to separate the soldiers from the general populace at these events: *militem secrevit a populo*.⁷⁵ It is not clear from this passage whether the partition refers to the seating arrangements for the audience (i.e. soldiers seated apart from the rest of the crowd) or, given the use of the praetorians as security, to a physical boundary between the spectators and those there to maintain order. It has been argued that the troops referred to by Suetonius must be off-duty soldiers, since any guard present should have had a particular area in which it was stationed.⁷⁶ In fact, the evidence seems to suggest that the close proximity between the security force and the audience had resulted in some confrontation, and that it was only after Augustus had ordered the separation of the two that the guard had its own station. As Campbell points out, “hostile relations between plebs and soldiers were exacerbated by the fights and disturbances at games and chariot races where soldiers were detailed to keep order.”⁷⁷

One might add the theatre to this list, for it was a place where violent activity often broke out, and the presence of soldiers could have provoked

⁷⁴ Suetonius, *Augustus* 14.

⁷⁵ Suetonius, *Augustus* 44.1. Gaggero (1990), 263, note 2 refers to these as praetorian cohorts. A suggestion by Rich (1991), 194 that the troops were first stationed at the games in AD 15 “in response to the disturbances of the previous year” overlooks the fact that there would have been a need for some sort of policing much earlier; since the emperor presided over these events, he could not risk confrontation and disruption occurring there.

⁷⁶ Rawson (1987), 99; cf. also Scobie (1988), 204.

⁷⁷ Campbell (1994), 171.

additional incidents. Valerius Maximus referred to the theatre as a “military camp in the city” (*urbana castra*), indicating that the presence of soldiers was highly visible.⁷⁸ In fact, in AD 15, there was an increase in violence in the theatre. On one particular occasion, members of the audience were killed as well as praetorians and a centurion.⁷⁹ Tacitus adds that a tribune of the guard was injured while trying to maintain order and stop any attacks against the magistrates who were present. It is clear that praetorians were there to take part in the policing at the theatre. Balsdon argues that they were used in this instance because “the City Prefecture, with command of the urban cohorts, was not yet established.”⁸⁰ Yet we know from Tacitus that Lucius Calpurnius Piso had been appointed as urban prefect by AD 14 at least, and probably a year earlier, and therefore the option of using the urban cohorts clearly was available.⁸¹ The praetorians were involved here simply because, in this period, security at the games was one of their administrative duties.

Probably the most well known association of the guard with the games is the occasion on which Caligula was murdered.⁸² Praetorians were in attendance,

⁷⁸ Valerius Maximus 2.4.1: *proximus a militaribus institutis ad urbana castra, id est theatra* . . .

⁷⁹ Tacitus, *Annals* 1.77.1; see also Suetonius, *Tiberius* 37.2. Cf. Cameron (1976), 223.

⁸⁰ Balsdon (1969), 418, note 117.

⁸¹ Tacitus, *Annals* 6.11.3 where the death of Piso is noted, along with the observation that he had gained approval for his conduct as urban prefect *viginti per annos*. The passage falls under the entries for the year AD 32. Suetonius (*Tiberius* 42.1), however, records that Piso was given his post by Tiberius. Vitucci (1956), 113 has him appointed in AD 13.

⁸² See above, “The Guard as a Specialized Military Unit”, 159-62.

but it is not clear from the sources whether they were there only as protection for the emperor, or for security in the theatre as well. The issue is complicated by the fact that the event took place on the Palatine where there would have been a cohort on duty anyway. The most important aspect of this incident for our purposes, however, is the absence of the urban cohorts at the time of the murder. If it had been their duty to be on watch at games such as these, then one would expect some mention of them in the aftermath of the assassination. Instead, all we are told is that the German bodyguard reacted with anger, indiscriminately slaughtering several senators and threatening the crowd until they were calmed down.⁸³ It is not clear how many cohorts were in the vicinity; Chaerea was there with his men as part of the change of the watch on the Palatine, but it is likely that there were additional units patrolling the area, given the large number of people in attendance.⁸⁴ The apparent absence of the urban cohorts, however, provides some of the strongest proof that it was the responsibility of the guard to police the games, at least in the first half of the first century.

Under Nero, we hear of the praetorians attending theatrical performances of the emperor. In AD 59, a cohort of the guard along with centurions, tribunes

⁸³ Josephus, *AJ* 19.119-126; 138-142. It should be noted, however, that the account in Josephus is rather incoherent, and it is difficult to ascertain the exact chronology of events. Hurley (1993), 212 interprets the passage at 119-122 as indicating that the Germans had come "rushing out of their station on the Palatine." But it makes more sense that they were in the theatre at the time of the assassination, having accompanied the emperor there.

⁸⁴ Josephus (*AJ* 19.76) notes that the crowd was sizeable: πολλῶν μυριάδων ἀνθρώπων. He also (*AJ* 19.91) describes Chaerea as taking his place among the tribunes, close to Caligula, which suggests that there were other cohorts in attendance besides that of Chaerea.

and their prefect were present at Nero's stage debut at the "youth games" in Rome.⁸⁵ It is difficult to tell from the text whether these soldiers were there as the personal bodyguard for the emperor, as security to maintain order during the entertainment, as part of the audience, or perhaps, all of these. Dio's description supports the idea of the praetorians policing the audience, since they are said to be standing around while the rest of the people were seated.⁸⁶

At Nero's public debut in Naples in AD 64, there also were soldiers present, though again it is not entirely clear from our source whether they were there as security or as spectators.⁸⁷ Koestermann argues that they are members of the praetorians who normally accompanied Nero as his bodyguard, but the text seems to single out their presence.⁸⁸ Tacitus divides those who were there out of respect for Nero (*per honorem*) or for some useful function (*varios usus*), and then adds that even troops (*etiam militum manipuli*) were in attendance. It seems possible that the soldiers were there in an official capacity as security for the games (counted among those who were in attendance for a practical purpose), and that there was a great number of them. The fact that Tacitus highlighted the

⁸⁵ Tacitus, *Annals* 14.15.4-5; Dio 61.20.2.

⁸⁶ Dio 61.20.2: πολλῶν μὲν στρατιωτῶν παρεστηκότων. παντὸς δὲ τοῦ δήμου, ὅσον αἱ ἔδραι ἐχώρησαν, καθημένου.

⁸⁷ Tacitus, *Annals* 15.33.3: *ergo contractum oppidanorum vulgus, et quos e proximis coloniis et municipiis eius rei fama civerat, quique Caesarem per honorem aut varios usus sectantur, etiam militum manipuli, theatrum Neapolitanorum complent.*

⁸⁸ Koestermann (1965), vol. 4, 224.

presence of the soldiers must be of significance and could have resulted from the fact that the forces were so great as to be noteworthy.⁸⁹ After all, Nero was intending to leave for Greece after his debut, and so probably had a greater number of praetorians with him than would be usual.

It was also around this time that Nero created the *Augustiani*, who served as official supporters for him whenever he performed.⁹⁰ Bradley has concluded that “according to the literary record the functions of the *Augustiani* were to serve as cheerleaders for Nero’s performances and to act as an imperial bodyguard.”⁹¹ But his evidence for these men acting as a guard rests on a single passage in Dio, which refers to “*equites* who formed a bodyguard for Nero”.⁹² But Bradley may have misinterpreted Dio, for the context indicates that these οἱ ἱππεῖς οἱ σωματοφύλακες τοῦ Νέρωνος are engaged in beast hunts. We know that the cavalry of the praetorian guard had previously taken part in *venationes* under Claudius, and it was probably this group to whom Dio is referring.⁹³ The

⁸⁹ The use of *manipuli* in connection with the guard is also found in Tacitus, *Annals* 12.56.2, where it indicates a large number of praetorians employed as protection by Claudius at his naumachia. See below, 208.

⁹⁰ The *Augustiani* were either knights or soldiers. See Tacitus, *Annals* 14.15.5 (*equites Romani*); Dio 61.20.3–4 (στρατιώτας); Suetonius, *Nero* 20.3. Cf. Bradley (1978), 127–8. There had been professional applause leaders in the theatre prior to this time; see, for example, Tacitus, *Annals* 1.16.3.

⁹¹ Bradley (1978), 127.

⁹² Dio 61.9.1: ἐν δὲ τινὶ θέᾳ ἄνδρες ταύρους ἀπὸ ἵππων, συμπαραθέοντές σφισι, κατέστρεφον, τετρακοσίας τε ἄρκτους καὶ τριακοσίους λέοντας οἱ ἱππεῖς οἱ σωματοφύλακες τοῦ Νέρωνος κατηκόντισαν. . .

⁹³ Suetonius, *Claudius* 21.3.

Augustiani, then, were not intended to be anything more than leaders of the applause for the emperor, whereas the functions of security, both to guard the princeps and to maintain order during these events, were fulfilled by the praetorians.

At the Neronia of AD 65, the praetorians clearly are seen to be acting as a policing body. Members of the guard patrolled the seats, ensuring the enthusiasm of the crowd, and punishing those who were seen to be disrupting the applause.⁹⁴ Monitoring the eagerness of the audience was out of the ordinary for the guard, although protecting against disruptions during performances was one of its responsibilities. Evidence for this comes from a passage in Suetonius in which it is recorded that a centurion was used to discipline a knight who had interrupted a favourite actor.⁹⁵ During the Neronia, the soldiers also seconded the request of the audience that Nero sing, and their prefects, followed by tribunes, carried his lyre for him.⁹⁶

⁹⁴ Tacitus, *Annals* 16.5.1: *turbarent gnaros ac saepe a militibus verberarentur, qui per cuneos stabant, ne quod temporis momentum impari clamore aut silentio segni praeteriret*. Koestermann (1965), vol. 4, 343 suggests that the *gnaros* (sc. *plaudendi*) refers to the *Augustiani*. It is interesting that Robinson (1992), 198 agrees that the soldiers of this passage are most likely members of the bodyguard and not of the urban cohorts, though she argues that security at the games was provided by the urban cohorts as a rule, and provides no reason for the change in this particular instance.

⁹⁵ Suetonius, *Caligula* 55.1. Praetors also had the power to remove members of the audience who were unruly; cf. Tacitus, *Annals* 1.77.4.

⁹⁶ Suetonius, *Nero* 21.1: *sed adiuvante vulgi preces etiam statione militum, quae tunc excubabat, repraesentaturum se pollicitus est libens*. The *statio militum* most likely refers to praetorians since *statio* indicates a guard (cf. Watson [1969], 73; Suetonius, *Augustus* 32.1), and the urban cohorts generally are not described as such. Cf. Bradley (1978), 132. He identifies the tribunes as belonging to the *Augustiani* or the urban cohorts, but the involvement of the prefects and the soldiers makes it more likely that these commanders are praetorians.

One of the main reasons for Nero's trip to Greece was to participate in the contests, and it is not surprising to find the guard acting as security at such performances, since soldiers would have been in attendance as protection for the emperor. It is recorded that, during the tour, no one was allowed to leave the theatre while Nero was performing, and therefore it might be assumed that the praetorians were the ones who would have enforced such a rule.⁹⁷ As well, at one of these events, when a young recruit saw Nero in chains on the stage, he rushed forward to help him, misinterpreting his plight.⁹⁸ Dio even records that the praetorians received money to attend these performances.⁹⁹ Clearly, members of the guard were in attendance as a means of providing protection for the emperor, but also to quell any disruptions which might arise among the crowd.

It was also in the reign of Nero that an experiment was tried in which the troops normally on duty at the theatre were dismissed. Tacitus records that the cohort was removed at the end of AD 55 to allow for a greater pretense of freedom for the audience, and to stop the corruption of those soldiers who were

⁹⁷ Suetonius, *Nero* 23.2. But we know from Suetonius (*Vespasian* 4.4) that Vespasian left the theatre on several occasions, offending Nero (cf. also Tacitus, *Annals* 16.5.3; Dio 66.11.2). It is possible, however, that most members of the audience were forced to stay.

⁹⁸ Suetonius, *Nero* 21.3; cf. Dio 63.10.2.

⁹⁹ Dio 63.10.3. It is possible, however, that οἱ στρατιῶται in 10.1 refers not to the guard but to the *Augustiani* who are also referred to in this way in 8.4.

on duty at the events.¹⁰⁰ The second reason is the more interesting, since it suggests that those members of the guard who were in attendance were being distracted by the atmosphere at these events and therefore were not performing their duty. Nero also may have been uneasy about the interaction between the praetorians and the rest of the crowd. It was noted above that Augustus had separated the soldiers and the people, and perhaps the possibility of sedition was a constant cause for concern. But the removal of the soldiers did not last. By the following year, because of fights between factions supporting different actors, the cohort was back again.¹⁰¹

Problems with actors were a major concern throughout the Julio-Claudian period.¹⁰² In AD 14, at the inaugural games in memory of Augustus, there had been disturbances because of disputes between actors.¹⁰³ Augustus himself had shown greater leniency towards them but Tiberius imposed further restrictions in AD 15, and it is possible that conflict resulted from the decrease in pay which

¹⁰⁰ Tacitus, *Annals* 13.24.1-2: *quo maior species libertatis esset, utque miles theatri licentiae non permixtus incorruptior ageret*; cf. also Dio 61.8.3. Freis (1967), 45, followed by Robinson (1992), 197 understands the soldiers on duty to belong to an urban cohort, but from the Latin (*statio cohortis*), it is more likely the praetorians who are meant. On *statio*, see above, note 96. Most commentators also understand the *statio* to be that of the praetorian guard. See, for example Koestermann (1965), vol. 3, 280; Cameron (1976), 224; Rudich (1993), 21.

¹⁰¹ Tacitus, *Annals* 13.25.4.

¹⁰² Cameron (1976), 225 notes that the theatre was notorious for "rowdyism", whereas events at the circus did not promote "regular and violent brawls."

¹⁰³ Tacitus, *Annals* 1.54.2.

Tiberius had implemented.¹⁰⁴ Later on, however, there were periods when actors were banished completely from Rome because of disruptive incidents.¹⁰⁵ An examination of the terms used by Suetonius in connection with actors concludes that “he frequently associates theatres and actors with the absence of order”; it may have been this propensity for violence at the theatre which necessitated stricter security measures there.¹⁰⁶

One of the main concerns for the emperors at these events was the opposition of the audience to their policies. The gathering of such a large crowd provided a means of communication between the ruler and the people, and allowed him to display the power of his empire.¹⁰⁷ But it also enabled the people to demonstrate against the emperor and his actions or to make requests of him, and in a more open manner than might otherwise have been possible.¹⁰⁸ The princeps could not afford to ignore such groups.¹⁰⁹ On several occasions, there

¹⁰⁴ *Augustus*: Suetonius, *Augustus* 45.3; Tacitus, *Annals* 1.77.3. *Tiberius*: Tacitus, *Annals* 1.77.4; cf. Suetonius, *Tiberius* 34.1. See also Robinson (1992), 203.

¹⁰⁵ See, for example, Tacitus, *Annals* 4.14.3; Suetonius, *Tiberius* 37.2; Dio 57.21.3 (under Tiberius, recalled by Caligula; cf. Dio 59.2.5); Suetonius, *Nero* 16.2 (under Nero, though they had been recalled by 60; cf. Tacitus, *Annals* 14.21.4).

¹⁰⁶ Wistrand (1992), 35. Cf. also Cameron (1976), 223-24. For Tacitus' pejorative descriptions of the theatre in his Neronian books, see Aubrion (1990), 199-200. On Dio's view of the games (“... in writing of the games he sees them more as a political institution rather than as a social phenomenon”), see Newbold (1975), 589-604.

¹⁰⁷ Wistrand (1992), 65; see also Yavetz (1969), 22-24; Hopkins (1983), 15.

¹⁰⁸ Yavetz (1969), 21; Nippel (1995), 87. Cf. also Tengström (1977), 47-49.

¹⁰⁹ Yavetz (1969), 132. Cf. also Cameron (1976), 162; Wiedemann (1992), 168-9; 175. Tiberius in fact did stay away from the games, but whether simply out of distaste for the entertainment, or to avoid displays of negative sentiment is impossible to say. See Yavetz (1969), 23; Tengström (1977), 49; Veyne (1990), 399-401.

were protests over various issues, for example, concerning the high price of grain under Tiberius and an increase in taxes under Caligula.¹¹⁰ Tiberius is said to have chastised the magistrates for not restraining those causing the disturbances in the theatre through the use of the authority of the state; whether the application of *publica auctoritas* would have included bringing in the soldiers is not known.¹¹¹ It is conceivable that one of the main reasons for the presence of soldiers at events like gladiatorial contests or the theatre was to restrict any dissension to peaceful displays and to stop matters from getting out of hand.¹¹²

We also hear of the personal involvement of the praetorians in the games under Claudius, an apparently new development in their history. Members of the guard, including tribunes and their prefect, took part in beast hunts.¹¹³ The reason for their participation is not given in the sources, though such a display of military prowess provided yet another demonstration of the power of the imperial bodyguard, and at the same time, furnished an opportunity for

¹¹⁰ *Grain riots*: Tacitus, *Annals* 6.13.1. Demonstrations against the price of grain in AD 19 also probably occurred at either the theatre or the games. Cf. Tacitus, *Annals* 2.87; Cameron (1976), 164. *Taxes*: Josephus, *AJ* 19.24-26 (soldiers not specified, but undoubtedly meant); Dio 59.28.11. According to Dio, those demonstrating were killed by soldiers (ὕπὸ τῶν στρατιωτῶν). It is possible that Suetonius, *Caligula* 41.1 also refers to this incident.

¹¹¹ Tacitus, *Annals* 6.13.1.

¹¹² Yavetz (1969), 10. Cf. also Cameron (1976), 174. See, for example, Dio 59.13.3-5 where he records dissension between Caligula and the people at the games, and the subsequent arrests of those opposing the emperor.

¹¹³ Suetonius, *Claudius* 21.3. For a similar incident under Nero, see Dio 61.9.1.

individual guard members to gain honour in a public exhibition.¹¹⁴ An appearance in the arena may have been seen as a quasi-military exercise, like the parades of the praetorians which the emperors held for the public, but in this instance, the contest in the arena replaced combat in the field. It should not be viewed as a way of debasing or humiliating the soldiers, since even men of high standing had been involved as hunters and as charioteers in the reign of Augustus.¹¹⁵ Subsequent emperors continued this trend, allowing senators and knights to participate not only in beast hunts, but also in gladiatorial contests.¹¹⁶ It has been noted that “what attracted [senators and knights] was the opportunity to display their military prowess, their courage and their skill, plus the desire for victory, and the shouts of the crowd”, and no doubt, the same could be said of the guard.¹¹⁷ The involvement of praetorians in such events, therefore, while not necessarily conveying distinction on the individual soldier, allowed an opportunity to display skills not often allowed these men.

¹¹⁴ Ville (1981), 170, however, considers this display a cost-saving measure, referring to it as an innovation which was “more spectacular than expensive.” Cf. Balsdon (1969), 310; Plass (1995), 72; Ville (1981), 258-9.

¹¹⁵ Suetonius, *Augustus* 43.2; Dio 56.25.7-8. The practice of *equites* taking part in gladiatorial contests is attested under Caesar as well; cf. Suetonius, *Caesar* 39.2; Dio 43.23.4-5. Cf. Hopkins (1983), 12.

¹¹⁶ *Tiberius*: Dio 57.14.3. *Caligula*: Suetonius, *Caligula* 18.3; Dio 59.10.2. Cf. also Barrett (1990), 45: “prominent citizens took part in the [gladiatorial games], reputedly forced to do so but probably voluntarily.” *Nero*: Tacitus, *Annals* 14.14.5; Dio 61.17.3; Suetonius, *Nero* 12.1.

¹¹⁷ Hopkins (1983), 21.

Claudius also gave gladiatorial games at the *Castra Praetoria* on the anniversary of his accession; these are described by Suetonius as *sine venatione apparatuque*.¹¹⁸ It is unknown whether members of the guard would have participated in these games. While the use of the camp may seem to indicate that these were private celebrations, it is difficult to know exactly where these games would have been held, for there does not seem to be a large enough space in the camp itself.¹¹⁹ It is possible, therefore, that the games would have been held outside the walls and be attended by the public as well. If so, it would have provided Claudius with another opportunity to parade the praetorians before the citizens.

One occasion where the guard was used not only to protect the audience from the participants but also as part of the spectacle was the *naumachia* staged by Claudius in AD 52.¹²⁰ The sources record that nineteen thousand men took part and that the emperor used double cohorts of praetorians on rafts surrounding those participating in the battle; it was the duty of these soldiers to launch catapults at the participants.¹²¹ Given the number of men involved in the

¹¹⁸ Suetonius, *Claudius* 21.4; cf. also Dio 60.17.9. Ville (1977), 170 remarks on the lack of expense in putting on such a show.

¹¹⁹ See Appendix 3, "The *Castra Praetoria*", 272, note 13.

¹²⁰ Augustus had staged a *naumachia* in 2 BC, but it is not recorded whether the praetorians took part in that event. Cf. Augustus, *Res Gestae* 23.

¹²¹ Tacitus, *Annals* 12.56.2; cf. Suetonius, *Claudius* 21.6; Dio 60.33.3–4. See Grant (1974), 158 who comments on the use of the praetorian cavalry in addition to infantry, chosen because they were good shots.

event, there was a need for additional protection for the audience as well, and this no doubt also would have been the responsibility of the guard.

If the praetorians were being employed as security at these events, the urban cohorts were not idle. We know that soldiers had been utilized by Augustus to monitor the streets during the spectacles.¹²² There was ample opportunity for theft and vandalism at those times since a great number of citizens were at the venues. It was presumably members of the urban cohorts that were used, since patrolling the city was one of their regular duties.¹²³ The same unit likely was employed during the reign of Caligula to quiet the neighbourhood where the games were to take place in order to prevent his horse, Incitatus, from being disturbed.¹²⁴ It was also under this emperor that several people, having arrived at the circus in the middle of the night to procure free seats, were driven away because they were disturbing the emperor's sleep. Many people were killed in the confusion.¹²⁵ Though the responsibility of removing

¹²² Suetonius, *Augustus* 43.1: *quibus diebus custodes in urbe disposuit, ne raritate remanentium grassatoribus obnoxia esset*. In the same passage, he mentions that Augustus sometimes provided shows in all areas of the city and on very many stages: *fecitque nonnumquam etiam vicatim ac pluribus scaenis per omnium linguarum histriones*. Given such a large number of venues, there would be a need for a great number of soldiers to act as security at these sites, and the guard, as well as the urban cohorts, must have been distributed throughout the city.

¹²³ Wiedemann (1992), 176 assigns this task to the *vigiles*, but there is no reason for this responsibility to fall to them.

¹²⁴ Suetonius, *Caligula* 55.3.

¹²⁵ Suetonius, *Caligula* 26.4: *inquietatus fremitu gratuita in Circo loca de media nocte occupantium, omnis fustibus abegit; elisi per eum tumultum viginti amplius equites R., totidem matronae, super innumeram turbam ceteram*.

the crowd probably fell to the urban cohorts since they would have been patrolling the streets anyway, it is possible that the praetorian cohort on duty at the palace could have been used as well. As was noted above, there was always a possibility of riots with large public gatherings, and this was probably the reason for the evacuation of the crowd rather than the sheer annoyance from the noise, for on another occasion, Caligula granted impromptu games when they were demanded of him by those in the same area.¹²⁶

People came from all over Italy to attend events at the theatre and circus in Rome. An increase in the population of the city meant that the emperors had to take greater measures for public safety at such times. It was not only the basic maintenance of order at such venues, but also matters such as the prevention of crime in the streets on these occasions that were of concern. Moreover, the potential for public demonstrations getting out of hand at such times posed a problem. The use of the guard as police at the spectacles in the first part of the first century AD can be discerned from the sources, though it must be noted that the language of the passages rarely specifies from which contingent these soldiers come, and so it is primarily from the context that any, albeit tentative, conclusions can be drawn.¹²⁷ Since the urban cohorts were responsible for policing the city as a whole, and that duty would continue to be necessary when

¹²⁶ Suetonius, *Caligula* 18.3; cf. Hurley (1993), 110.

¹²⁷ Cf. Nippel (1993), 93.

the games were on, it is unlikely that their numbers would have allowed them to act as security both at crowded events and in the city. We know that praetorians were being used early in the reign of Tiberius to police the games, and it may be inferred from this that the references to *milites* elsewhere indicates members of the guard. No doubt it would be the praetorians whom the citizens of Rome would most clearly identify with the term “soldiers”, since they were the most visible military presence in the city. Their use for security at these venues, even when the emperor himself was not present, also reinforced for the audience that they were enjoying the event by his munificence, and reminded them that these soldiers were his personal armed troops. Moreover, the additional need for the emperor to have access to information regarding the mood of the populace at the theatre and the games also may have been a factor in the use of his personal guard as police there.

Taxation

It was under Caligula that we have the first and only evidence that the guard was used to collect taxes. The precedent for the military to be involved in such a task comes from the provinces. Soldiers had been sent occasionally by Augustus and Tiberius to gather the tribute which was owed by inhabitants of the empire, for example, in 25 BC from the Salassi and in AD 29 from the

Frisians.¹²⁸ Suetonius records that late in Caligula's reign, the emperor used the praetorians instead of the *publicani* for levying taxes in Rome apparently because the profit to be made was so great (*quia lucrum exuberabat*).¹²⁹ But a more plausible reason for the involvement of the guard is the hostility of the citizens towards the imposition of additional taxation, for not only had taxes been levied on almost everything, and their proclamation only made orally, they also later were doubled.¹³⁰ This was the first time that direct taxation had been imposed in Rome and the additional payment was bound to be very unpopular.¹³¹ In fact, the anger of the people became evident at the chariot races where they petitioned to have the amount reduced; the emperor ordered those who were persistent in their shouting to be hauled off and executed.¹³²

Immediately after his report of this incident, Josephus records the employment of the guard as tax collectors.¹³³ Since there was no method in place

¹²⁸ *Augustus*: Dio 53.25.4. Augustus also had men of military age arrested and sold. He then took the best land and settled three thousand praetorians there in what later became known as Augusta Praetoria; cf. Strabo, *Geography* 4.6.7. *Tiberius*: Tacitus, *Annals* 4.72.1. The demands for payment of the levy from the Frisians resulted in a confrontation that ended with many Roman losses; cf. 72.2-74.1.

¹²⁹ Suetonius, *Caligula* 40. For details concerning the *publicani*, see Crook (1967), 233-36.

¹³⁰ Dio 59.29.8; Josephus, *AJ* 19.28.

¹³¹ Cf. Barrett (1990), 228. The new taxes were abolished by Claudius; see Dio 60.4.1.

¹³² Josephus, *AJ* 19.24-26; cf. also Suetonius, *Caligula* 41.1; Dio 59.28.11. See Barrett (1990), 228. It fell to the praetorians to perform the executions. Balsdon (1934), 103 assigns the demonstration at the circus to "the *Ludi Circenses* (on or before 5 January, A.D. 41)", but there is no evidence for that particular date, and he has reversed the order of events in Josephus by having Chaerea being remiss in collecting the taxes before the demonstration took place. Wiseman (1991), 49 suggests the *Ludi Romani* in September of AD 40.

¹³³ Josephus, *AJ* 19.28.

to manage the collection of the new taxes and the resentment of the citizens had been shown to be considerable, the employment of the emperor's personal guard to enforce payment was the easiest solution.¹³⁴ Among the officers assigned to the task was Cassius Chaerea, who is said to have taken his time in collecting the taxes because he pitied those who suffered under the strain of paying.¹³⁵ But the real reason for the delay may have been the amount of time the collection entailed. Suetonius records that the centurions and tribunes were assigned to this duty, and even if they simply were overseeing the work of their soldiers, the magnitude of the task would have been enormous given the widespread nature of the taxation.

Construction Projects

One area where the guard was used in the city and elsewhere was on construction projects. Yet, what at first appears to be an insult to such an elite unit may not, in fact, have been at all debasing. For the Julio-Claudian period, there are two examples in the sources of such enterprises.¹³⁶ Under Caligula, the

¹³⁴ Hurley (1993), 153 argues that the transference to the guard was a move away from the *publicani*, but there is no evidence that praetorians continued to collect taxes beyond this very brief period, and under Nero, we again hear of complaints against the excessiveness of the *publicani*; see Tacitus, *Annals* 13.50.1-51.2.

¹³⁵ Josephus, *AJ* 19.29. See Gagé (1969), 278; Barrett (1990), 161.

¹³⁶ The engineering expertise for the artificially constructed bridge between Puteoli and Baiae built during the reign of Caligula also may have come from among the ranks of the praetorians; see Dio 59.17.7-8.

praetorians worked on the construction of stables for the horses of the Green faction of charioteers.¹³⁷ The emperor was devoted to that group and one of the drivers, Eutychus, was a particular favourite. Josephus records that the soldiers were worn out because they were forced to construct these stables, but the inclusion of the story among the details of the aftermath of Caligula's assassination casts doubt on the insinuation, for the purpose seems to be to show that the emperor had debased his guard by making them do menial tasks.¹³⁸ It is possible that the major contribution of the praetorians to the project was not the physical labour of construction but rather the planning of the building. It is known from inscriptions that, by the second century at least, each cohort had its own surveyor, and architects associated with the guard are also attested.¹³⁹ It is conceivable, then, that the guard was involved in the design of the building instead of being used for menial drudgery.

The second example falls under the reign of Nero. One of the assignments which fell to those guardsmen who accompanied the emperor to Greece was the beginning of the building of a canal at the isthmus of Corinth.¹⁴⁰ This assignment

¹³⁷ Josephus, *A*/ 19.257.

¹³⁸ Durry (1938), 276 remarks that the emperor did not fear "to abuse" the guard in this task, clearly an uncritical reading of Josephus.

¹³⁹ *Surveyors*: Sherk (1974), 549-550. He claims that there is "sufficient evidence to show that at least one [surveyor] was attached to each of the . . . cohorts." *Architects*: Watson (1969), 144; 214, note 497 (the inscription of an architect of the guard dated to the late first century AD). The inclusion of such skilled personnel among guard members would not be surprising, for the legions each had similar positions associated with them.

¹⁴⁰ Suetonius, *Nero* 19.2; cf. also Dio 62.16.1-2. The project also had been conceived by both Caesar and Caligula; cf. Suetonius, *Julius* 44.3, *Caligula* 21. Nero himself inaugurated the work. Griffin

should not be viewed as a demeaning task, since it appears that their responsibility may have had more to do with the engineering and surveying for the project rather than with physical excavation. The text of Suetonius may provide support for this interpretation: *in Achaia Isthmum perfodere adgressus praetorianos pro contione ad incohandum opus cohortatus est*. The inclusion in the text of what would seem to be a minor detail in the construction of the canal – Nero holding a meeting of the soldiers to discuss the project and encouraging them to begin the work – perhaps indicates that they were to be involved in the design and layout rather than the actual digging. In fact, there would not have been great numbers of soldiers available for physical labour because they would need to be employed in other tasks as well.¹⁴¹ It may be, rather, that the majority of the work force was comprised of prisoners, and if this report is true, the soldiers would be needed as well to oversee the work and act as security.¹⁴² Whatever their responsibility, the work had progressed for approximately half a mile before it was halted.¹⁴³

(1984), 162 suggests that it may have been timed to follow the Isthmian Games. A commemorative relief of the proposed canal still exists; see Vermeule (1968), 211; 434.

¹⁴¹ We do not know how many praetorians accompanied Nero on the trip to Greece, but not all of them would have been available for excavation, since some would be needed to guard the emperor and to perform other tasks such as executions; cf. Dio 63.17.3-5.

¹⁴² Josephus, *BJ* 3.540 (six thousand Jewish prisoners from Galilee); ps.-Lucian, *Nero* 3-4; Philostratus, *Life of Apollonius* 5.19 (possibly political prisoners used as well. Cf. Rudich [1993], 292-3; Bradley [1978], 116-7). One source does describe the soldiers, however, as working where there was flat ground and no rock; cf. ps.-Lucian, *Nero* 3.

¹⁴³ The distance is given in Philostratus, *Life of Apollonius* 4.34; the time spent was calculated by Gerster (1884), 225-232 to be three to four months duration. Cf. also Pausanias (*Guide to Greece* 2.5) who comments that he was able to see clearly where the digging had started. When the

Judicial

One other issue which should be considered here is the development of the juridical function of the praetorian prefects. While this responsibility slowly devolved on them throughout the first two centuries of the imperial period and is of particular importance by the end of the second century, there has been much discussion about the early period, especially as to when we first can discern their use in this way.¹⁴⁴ Under Tiberius, Sejanus no doubt was instrumental in bringing certain people to trial, and although there are no obvious examples where juridical responsibility had been delegated to him, it is likely that when Tiberius was on Capri, the prefect had a hand in such issues.¹⁴⁵

We have no evidence either concerning Sejanus' direct involvement in interrogations and executions; he seems to have preferred to work behind the scenes. His successor, on the other hand, is known to have participated personally in the questioning of witnesses, and rumours of fabricated evidence

modern canal was excavated, traces of the ancient work still were visible and it followed the same line. As Bradley (1978), 115 points out, this shows the acuteness of the ancient engineers' planning, not surprising if the surveyors had been trained in the military.

¹⁴⁴ See Durry (1938), 171-6; Passerini (1939), 246-51 (arguing for the prefects to have had these responsibilities from the beginning, with Macro as his example); Crook (1955), 140 (who chooses Hadrian, against Mommsen's choice of Marcus Aurelius); (1967), 70-72. Cf. also Howe (1966²), 32.

¹⁴⁵ Grant (1974), 133-4 argues, however, that Sejanus was responsible for many of the treason trials which occurred in the reign of Tiberius: "... once a conviction had been secured, it was convenient that he personally controlled the praetorian officers and guardsmen who could detain or execute the condemned." Cf. also Levick (1976), 195; Rogers (1935), 86. One such example may be the case of Cremutius Cordus, who was charged by two of Sejanus' clients, though his connection seems to end there; cf. Tacitus, *Annals* 4.34-5.

place Macro in a rather unfavourable light.¹⁴⁶ The case against Albucilla, and her alleged lovers in AD 37 is one such instance.¹⁴⁷ According to the information submitted to the senate, Macro had supervised the torture of Albucilla's slaves and the interrogation of witnesses, and Tacitus admits the possibility of forged evidence against them because one of the defendants, Lucius Arruntius, was a personal enemy of the prefect.¹⁴⁸ Despite the suspicion that the evidence had been fabricated, and the absence of any correspondence from the emperor, the senate proceeded with the trials, perhaps because of its reluctance to challenge Macro. As Levick notes, the use of letters from Tiberius to initiate charges against citizens presented a problem for the senate, and was easily abused by the prefects (both Macro and Sejanus before him) who could conceivably forge or adapt instructions from the emperor to meet their own needs.¹⁴⁹ The role of the guard in these cases is not known, but it is likely that one of the responsibilities

¹⁴⁶ Dio 58.21.3; cf. 24.2. Cf. Bauman (1972), 124. Tacitus (*Annals* 6.29.3) records that Macro used techniques similar to those of his predecessor, but more insidiously: [*Macro*] *easdem artes occultius exercebat*.

¹⁴⁷ Tacitus, *Annals* 6.47.3; for discussion of this incident, see Forsyth (1969), 204-207; Bauman (1972), 130-34; Barrett (1996), 49-50. Albucilla was the former wife of Satrius Secundus whose name is associated in Tacitus with the exposure of the "conspiracy" of Sejanus. This case was not the first time that Macro had been associated with judicial matters. In AD 34, he had taken part in the trial of Mamercus Aemilius Scaurus. Tacitus (*Annals* 6.29) records that the charges then were adultery and dabbling in magic, though the real reason was alleged to be the hatred which the prefect felt for him.

¹⁴⁸ See also Dio 58.27.2. Cf. Seager (1972), 239; Barrett (1990), 40. The supervision of the torture by the praetorian prefect suggests that it was members of the guard who were performing this task.

¹⁴⁹ Levick (1976), 198.

of the soldiers was to assist in the interrogation of witnesses, as happened with Quintilia under Caligula.¹⁵⁰

Prefects continued to take part in the interrogation and torture of witnesses and the accused, for example, under Claudius after the exposure of the plot by Lucius Arruntius Camillus Scribonianus and Annius Vinicianus, and under Nero when Faenius Rufus and Tigellinus took part in the examination of the Pisonian conspirators.¹⁵¹ A passage in Seneca may provide one of the earliest examples we have of the delegation of judicial affairs to the prefect:

animadversurus in latrones duos Burrus praefectus tuus . . . exigebat a te, scriberes, in quos et ex qua causa animadverti velles; hoc saepe dilatum ut aliquando fieret,

*instabat.*¹⁵² Burrus also had the power of execution over Agrippina when he was put in charge of her interrogation after she had been accused of inciting Rubellius Plautus to revolution.¹⁵³ This, despite the fact that Nero was rumoured to want not only both Agrippina and Plautus killed, but also Burrus replaced with Gaius

¹⁵⁰ Cf. Josephus, *AJ* 19.32-36; Dio 59.26.4; Suetonius, *Caligula* 16.4. Chaerea had been given the job of supervising the torture of this woman, but it seems clear from the context that he was not alone in this task. Cf. above, "The Guard as a Specialized Military Unit", 159, note 130.

¹⁵¹ *Claudius*: Dio 60.16.3; 7; Suetonius, *Claudius* 42.1 *Nero*: See above, "The Guard as a Specialized Military Unit", 206.

¹⁵² Seneca, *De Clementia* 2.1.2; cf. Griffin (1984), 78: "[Burrus] is shown fulfilling one of the routine duties of the Praetorian Prefect, presenting execution orders to be annotated and signed . . .". See also Bradley (1978), 78. Contra Crook (1967), 301, note 20 who comments that Burrus was only "carrying out orders." But see Dio (52.24.3) on the prefects having the power of capital punishment.

¹⁵³ Tacitus, *Annals* 13.19-21; cf. Koestermann (1965), vol. 3, 274; Waltz, (1909), 227.

Caecina Tuscus.¹⁵⁴ Since, however, it was the prefect who, on the same night, convinced Nero to allow his mother the opportunity to defend herself, the report of his planned replacement is most likely inaccurate. In fact, it was because of Burrus' intervention that Agrippina not only was acquitted, but also was able to secure the destruction of those who had accused her, and rewards for some of her supporters.¹⁵⁵ The presence of Seneca and of imperial freedmen as witnesses during the questioning has been attributed to Nero's mistrust of his prefect to deal firmly with the defendant.¹⁵⁶ Burrus' role here as interrogator clearly anticipates the participation of future prefects in the hearing of evidence.¹⁵⁷

Shortly thereafter Burrus himself was charged with plotting to replace Nero on the throne with Faustus Cornelius Sulla Felix, and was brought to trial.¹⁵⁸ The proceedings were held before the emperor, not in the senate, with

¹⁵⁴ For Tuscus, see Demougin (1992), #671. The origin of the story is Fabius Rusticus. Tacitus does not subscribe to it, since both the elder Pliny and Cluvius Rufus record that the loyalty of Burrus was not called into question. McDermott (1949), 250-51, however, refers to the plan to remove Burrus as "a likely one".

¹⁵⁵ See Furneaux (1896), vol. 2, 179-80; Griffin (1984), 75; Bauman (1974), 211-13.

¹⁵⁶ Cf. Barrett (1996), 175-76; Griffin (1976), 79; Cizek (1972), 92. It appears that Burrus in fact took his responsibility seriously; Bauman (1974), 212 remarks on the adverb (*minaciter*) that Tacitus uses in connection with the interrogation of Agrippina.

¹⁵⁷ McDermott (1949), 251: "Burrus appeared much more prominently in this action than did Seneca because he was exercising one of the judicial functions which later made this prefecture a notable legal office." Bauman (1974), 212 denies that there was a trial: "The proceedings conducted by Burrus were a preliminary interrogation. . . The dossier forwarded to Nero persuaded him that there was no case for [Agrippina] to meet."

¹⁵⁸ Tacitus, *Annals* 13.23; cf. Dio 61.10.6. Sulla was exiled in AD 58 and murdered in AD 62.

the prefect himself acting as one of the judges.¹⁵⁹ He was acquitted of the charges.¹⁶⁰ Burrus' presence on the panel undoubtedly was dictated by the fact that he belonged to the emperor's inner council, though it is hard not to see irony in Nero's decision to allow him to hear his own case, given the nature of the charges.¹⁶¹ The prefect's involvement in legal affairs, in fact, can be viewed as part of the increased administrative responsibility which had been delegated under Nero.¹⁶²

The assignment of juridical powers to the prefects, then, seems to have begun much earlier than usually is accepted.¹⁶³ A passage in Tacitus may

¹⁵⁹ Cf. Barrett (1996), 178; McDermott (1949), 251; Oost (1958), 135-6; Rudich (1993), 21; Rogers (1955), 201. Griffin (1984), 254, note 39 does not believe that Burrus served as a judge at his own trial.

¹⁶⁰ Tacitus, *Annals* 13.23; Dio 61.10.6, who attributes the acquittal to Seneca's influence. Cf. Koestermann (1965), vol. 3, 279.

¹⁶¹ As Bauman (1974), 213 puts it, "on a manifestly false charge there was no need for a member of the *consilium* to vacate his seat." He later (1992), 198 argued that Burrus was able to vote "only on a preliminary point", though this is not expressed in the sources. Cf. also Crook (1955), 47; Rudich (1993), 21; McDermott (1949), 251. If, however, the emperor was mistrustful of Burrus as has been claimed recently by Barrett (1996), 161, he could have used this trial as a means of disposing of the prefect without pretense.

¹⁶² Passerini (1939), 248 argues that although the praetorian prefect was not a magistrate, the judicial responsibilities nevertheless were separate from the duties as a military commander, since as the latter, they had no jurisdiction over citizens in Rome. Yet it was exactly because the prefect had military power that the emperor could delegate responsibility for arrest, interrogation, and execution at an early date, and the development of judicial power derived from that. Cf. Waltz (1909), 236; Howe (1966³), 32: "As commander of the bodyguards and personal defender of the emperor, the praetorian prefect had probably been summoned to sit on the council from a very early date, whether it met as an advisory council of state or as a court of law."

¹⁶³ Cf. Brunt (1966), 473.

provide evidence that it was under Claudius that the prefect began to have some responsibility in judicial matters:

eodem anno saepius audita vox principis, parem vim rerum habendam a procuratoribus suis iudicatarum, ac si ipse statuisset. ac ne fortuito prolapsus videretur, senatus quoque consulto cautum plenius quam antea et uberius. nam divus Augustus apud equites illustres, qui Aegypto praesiderent, lege agi decretaque eorum proinde haberi iusserat, ac si magistratus Romani constituissent; mox alias per provincias et in Urbe pleraque concessa sunt, quae olim a praetoribus noscebantur.¹⁶⁴

“In the same year, the princeps was heard to say quite often that the decisions in cases judged by his procurators must be treated the same as if he himself had made them. And lest it seem to have slipped out by chance, the senate also decreed on it more fully and comprehensively than before. The divine Augustus had granted jurisdiction to the knights who governed Egypt and provided that their decrees be treated as if they had been decided by Roman magistrates. Soon, in the other provinces and in Rome, knights were ceded very many cases which used to be investigated by the praetors.” The phrase *equites alias per provincias et in Urbe* has been understood to mean that, along with others of their class, the praetorian prefects “had already acquired in some degree the jurisdiction which is otherwise attested only at a much later date.”¹⁶⁵ It seems, therefore, that by the mid first century AD, the praetorian prefects were part of the emperor’s *consilium*

¹⁶⁴ Tacitus, *Annals* 12.60.1-2.

¹⁶⁵ Brunt (1966), 473.

and provided input when cases were heard before the princeps.¹⁶⁶ Burrus' presence, then, at any trial held *intra cubiculum* would not be out of the ordinary, and one might assume that there were other instances when he took an active part in the examination of evidence.

By the end of the second century AD, the prefects had developed their judicial skills to such an extent that jurists of that period were associated with the office. Millar argues that "these wider juridical functions should be seen as extensions of the essential role of the praetorian prefects as protectors of the emperor and commander of the cohorts."¹⁶⁷ It is easy to see that the early stages in the development of this role for the praetorian prefect dealt with the interrogation of witnesses in the reign of Tiberius, and grew from there. The use of the praetorians in confinements and executions may, in fact, have generated this additional duty for the prefects, the next step in the progression from overseeing the arrests of those accused, to taking part in interrogations, to having significant responsibility for judicial affairs in the capital.

¹⁶⁶ Eden (1984), 142: "Under the early Empire the *amici Caesaris* constituted an unofficial but not unconstitutional advisory panel consulted by the emperor as and when he saw fit."

¹⁶⁷ Millar (1977), 125.

X. Conclusion

The praetorian guard was an elite military force, in existence for over three hundred years. Adapted from a republican institution by Augustus, it was in essence the personal army of the emperor, and, within a very short time, was responsible also for specialized military tasks and for various administrative duties. This development occurred primarily because of the relationship between the praetorians and the emperor, who saw that such a large number of men in Rome, answering only to himself, could be put to good use for his own benefit, and for the advantage of the city. Not only would they assist in the management of the capital, they also would serve as a constant reminder of the armed force that he had supporting him. It is, therefore, a mistake to consider the praetorians as simply the *bodyguard* of the emperor. From the very beginning, they played a much larger role and had a far greater impact on life in Rome because of their close affiliation with the machinery of state.

In the late stages of the republic, there first appeared a unit that is referred to as a praetorian cohort, whose purpose was to provide protection for the commander in the field. Provincial governors (as military commanders of their provinces) had similar units, but with a broader mandate: to provide administrative assistance as well as personal protection. This model of cohort is best illustrated by the observations of Cicero, in his letters and in his speech against Verres, where the praetorians are seen to be involved primarily in a

judicial capacity. It is not known what other responsibilities these soldiers might have had, but they appear to be functioning as much more than a military unit. The civil wars of the mid first century BC saw the emergence of praetorian cohorts for individuals who used these soldiers for their own personal gains, rather than for state business, that is, for intimidation as well as protection. It was undoubtedly with such precedents in mind that Augustus formed his own personal army, the imperial praetorian guard, from those soldiers of the republican praetorian cohorts not discharged after Actium.

The date for the establishment of the guard is given by Dio as 27 BC. From the very beginning, the praetorians formed a privileged unit, with a higher rate of pay, better living conditions because of the proximity to Rome, and a shorter term of service than the average legionary. Organized into nine cohorts of a thousand men each, they initially were dispersed throughout the city and nearby areas in an attempt to avoid the appearance of having so many armed men in the capital. Since this was the first time that soldiers had been stationed in Rome, Augustus was careful not to offend the citizens by clearly advertising how he had come to power and was maintaining his principate. In reality, however, the praetorians would have been increasingly visible to those in the city because of their growing involvement in its administration, and before long, all of the cohorts were brought into the capital to facilitate the coordination of their duties.

The organization of the guard did not change much under the Julio-Claudian emperors; the original arrangement by Augustus needed little improvement. Nevertheless, under Tiberius, one of the most important changes in the entire history of the guard occurred, when he brought all of the cohorts together into a single camp, the *Castra Praetoria*. The establishment of a permanent military base for the praetorians marked an unmistakable change from the years of Augustus. Now the basis of imperial power was clearly evident to all. The reason for the move is given by Tacitus: there had been a problem with discipline, and having all the soldiers together would allow for better control. But there was probably another reason not recorded in the sources: the expanded use of the praetorians in a variety of tasks, primarily in Rome, which went well beyond providing security for the emperor and his family. Having all the soldiers together would allow for better use of the manpower of the guard, since assignments could be coordinated more easily. Yet it would have been obvious to those in the capital that a change had occurred, since the camp dominated the heights north of Rome, and its message could not have been more obvious: the fortress provided a clear manifestation of imperial power and it was there to stay.

Around the same time as the construction of the camp, the number of cohorts was increased from nine to twelve. The date of this change is not recorded in the sources, but inscriptional evidence shows that it occurred during

the reign of Tiberius, and it is likely that it happened in conjunction with the building of the *Castra Praetoria*. The greater number of soldiers would allow for increased efficiency in performing the various responsibilities which the guard now had. Moreover, the additional forces would also provide a stronger show of military support for the emperor at a time when Tiberius was becoming increasingly concerned for his safety. It is instructive, however, that the layout of the camp allowed for the total strength of the praetorians to be disguised, in its use of cells along the wall, and double-storeyed barrack blocks. Apparently, Tiberius did not want to advertise that his private army had grown to a force of approximately twelve thousand men.

In the sources, the praetorian guard is often overshadowed by its commanders, the praetorian prefects. The office was created in 2 BC, possibly because of the increasing difficulty in coordinating the soldiers in their many assignments. The prefects had control of the day-to-day administration of the soldiers, working alongside their tribunes and centurions. But their close relationship with the emperor meant that they were perceived as having inordinate influence in the running of the state. In fact, the power that would later be associated with the office is not in evidence in this period, for the most part. Many of the men who held the prefecture in the Julio-Claudian period are known only by name, if at all. The exception, of course, is Sejanus. His career has been closely examined by scholars, and his influence greatly exaggerated. The

aspirations that have been attributed to him, especially his pursuit of imperial power, is a misinterpretation of the activities that brought him into the political arena, and which were later exploited by anti-Tiberian propaganda. The praetorian prefecture had not yet been firmly fixed when Sejanus held the position, and any action undertaken by him must be viewed in light of his dedication to the emperor, and to the welfare of the principate, rather than to personal ambition.

It should be noted that, from the very beginning, it was rare for these prefects to be career military men, even though they were put in charge of the emperor's personal troops. A few had served in some capacity in the army, but more often these appointments were the result of imperial patronage, which meant that they were chosen because of their affiliation with the imperial household, rather than for any particular ability to manage such a large military force. The reason is clear: the emperor needed to know that someone he could trust implicitly was in command of his guard, for the greatest danger he could potentially encounter would come from the armed men who were sworn to protect him. In the end, however, the prefects proved ineffective at stopping any conspiracy against the princeps, and on occasion, joined in themselves.

That the praetorians occasionally became caught up in the political life in Rome should surprise no one. Their duties placed both the officers and the regular soldiers in close proximity to the centre of power, and they obviously

took an interest in the affairs of state. Perhaps the most discernible illustration of this involvement in politics was during transitions of power. The grant of sizable donatives to the guard provides the strongest evidence of a tacit understanding that the soldiers had to be well rewarded for their acceptance of the new regime. When the praetorians took the initiative in political affairs, however, it was invariably the officers and the prefects who were at the forefront. Their close association with the emperor, and thus with the affairs of state, and the greater possibility of reward, encouraged some to take the risk of conspiring against the regime. On the other hand, the average soldier probably remained ambivalent for the most part about the various machinations of power, as long as his needs were looked after. The praetorians on the whole were pragmatic about their relationship with the emperor, and realized that they stood to gain little by challenging the status quo. Although not usually directly involved in conspiracies, the rank and file generally fared well: if the conspiracy failed, they were well rewarded for their loyalty; if it succeeded, they would be offered incentives to follow the new emperor. Despite their numbers, it was not the main body of soldiers that represented the clearest danger to the emperor, but rather those men whom he himself had placed in a position of trust.

The view of the imperial praetorian guard has long been restricted to its role as the personal guard of the emperor. But a closer examination of the various tasks which these troops performed reveals that they were much more

than a mere bodyguard. These other responsibilities have received virtually no scholarly attention, but they provide us with a more comprehensive understanding of the role of the guard in the state. The duties can be divided into two groups: the use of the praetorians in specialized military assignments, and their contribution to the civil administration of the city of Rome.

The use of the guard as a specialized military force was an extension of its role to ensure the safety of the emperor and, in connection with that duty, to provide assistance when required for the security of the state. The assignments were varied, but praetorians were usually sent only when previous attempts to find other solutions to a serious problem had failed. In each instance, the security of the emperor could have been compromised had the situation not been resolved. The guard was especially employed in cases where there was a need for covert action, or for additional security. Often such sensitive tasks were assigned to a special branch of praetorians known as the *speculatores*. There is little specific information about this unit in the Julio-Claudian period, however, because of the nature of their activities. But their very presence betrays the vulnerability of a regime based on maintaining control through intimidation and armed force.

Perhaps the most sinister of the duties assigned to the guard was the confinement, and often the execution, of those whom the emperor considered a risk. Generally these people came from the nobility, and most cases are clearly

political in nature. There are numerous examples of the use of praetorians to detain individuals who were simply thought to be a threat, and those who had actually been charged and were waiting to be tried. In several instances, the intimidating presence of the soldiers was enough to force the individual to commit suicide. Such an act would remove the responsibility from the emperor, and allow him to claim that he would have interceded on behalf of the accused and been lenient towards him, if only he had not killed himself. Members of the imperial family were also spied upon by those guardsmen who were ostensibly assigned to them for protection and prestige, but who clearly were reporting back to their superiors the conversations and events which they witnessed. Whether this was something that happened routinely with all who were provided with a contingent of guards is not certain, but it is possible that one of the principal duties for those soldiers assigned to family members was to keep apprised of their activities. The reason for the choice of the praetorian guard for such an onerous task was that it owed its allegiance to the emperor alone and could be relied upon to act in his best interests, regardless of how repulsive the job was. In fact, this reliability is seen in particular in the executions of members of the imperial family; there is seldom any hesitation to obey the orders of the emperor, despite the unpleasantness of the task.

In addition to acting as a tactical military unit, the guard was also employed in the routine civil administration of the capital. In fact, Augustus was

instrumental in providing a framework that enabled the city of Rome to be managed in a more professional manner, and it is in the context of this reorganization that one should include the duties assigned to the praetorians. In the republican period, the tendency had been to allocate tasks to individuals as the need arose, a very inefficient and piecemeal method of urban management. Augustus created numerous permanent positions, such as the positions of the *curatores*, which were filled by men from both the senatorial and equestrian classes, and together these offices formed the basis of a civil service in Rome. Similarly, he realized the benefits that could be gained from making use of his personal army, and so assigned a wide variety of tasks in the city to the guard, which, as a military unit, was efficient in handling such administrative responsibilities.

One of these duties was helping fight fires, no doubt because of the number of soldiers available to assist the *vigiles*, and in particular, the inadequacy of ancient fire-fighting. It is likely that the guard had had a much larger role in the prevention and suppression of fire in Rome and the surrounding areas before the creation of the *vigiles* in AD 6, and may have continued to function in the same capacity after this date. The presence of the imperial soldiers at fires would have reminded the populace that the emperor was looking out for them, and this concern was often reinforced by the attendance of the emperors themselves, or members of the imperial family, at these disasters. It should be remembered that

the praetorians were the personal force of the princeps and, since he was responsible for the welfare of the state, it is not surprising that they should be called upon to help in these instances. It also was in the emperor's best interest to keep his personal guard in the public eye, both to deter any challenges to his rule and for public relations, which their participation at the fires would have helped to foster.

The guard also was present as security at the many spectacles held in Rome each year. The potential for disturbances was great at the circus, the arena, and especially at the theatre where, on occasion, spectators had been killed. It is only reasonable to assume, therefore, that there would have been some system in place to ensure the protection of the crowd. We know that soldiers had been at the games providing security from early in the reign of Augustus, and that it became the regular practice to have a contingent there to maintain order. The urban cohorts would have been kept busy policing the city during these events; with the majority of citizens in attendance, there needed to be adequate protection against theft and vandalism in the city streets. The assignment of the praetorians to the games, then, provided a practical solution to the problem of maintaining control among the crowd. It is instructive that, on the one occasion when the soldiers were relieved of this duty at the theatre under Nero, they were back within a very short time because of fights in the stands.

A major concern of the emperor at these events was the potential for demonstrations against him or his policies. It is clear that the stationing of troops at the games would also ensure that such protests remained peaceful, and would allow the emperor to keep track of the disposition of the crowd. In connection with this responsibility, the more ominous task of spying on individuals at the events was also carried out by guard members, possibly by *speculatores*, since the atmosphere at the spectacles – so many people gathered together in one place, without restriction on conversation – encouraged greater freedom of speech than was usually possible. The use of the guard for security at these venues probably evolved from its responsibility to protect the emperor whenever he was in attendance. When he was not there, however, the presence of his personal soldiers would have served as a reminder to those in the stands that this was an imperial event, presented under the auspices of their princeps, and that they were being entertained through his munificence.

The praetorian guard of the Roman empire developed into a multifaceted unit that not only looked after the personal safety of the emperor, but also participated in the care of the state. Although the general view has been that these soldiers merely served as the imperial bodyguard, that notion must be revised to encompass the many other tasks that this personal army had. Augustus obviously saw the need to have adequate protection for his principate in the capital, but he also had a rather large number of soldiers whom he had to

organize after Actium, and he must have realized very quickly that such a force needed to be kept occupied if he was to maintain control. As a result, the utilization of the praetorians branched out into other areas of administration where their presence could be advantageous, both to the emperor and to the city, and where the benevolence of the princeps could be promulgated. Yet it must have been obvious to the citizens of Rome, with so many soldiers engaged in a wide variety of tasks, that the principate was, in reality, nothing other than a military dictatorship. The guard existed for the protection of the emperor and, through him, for the benefit of the state, but it always presented a threat of force, and that formed the basis of imperial rule.

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Appendix 1

The Sources for the Julio-Claudian Period

References to the praetorian guard in sources for the period of the Julio-Claudians are not numerous. The scarcity may be simply explained: by the time that the authors were writing, the presence of the guard in Rome had become commonplace and its activities not noteworthy. Moreover, since it was the personalities that attracted the attention of the authors, we have greater knowledge of men such as Sejanus and Burrus than of the soldiers they commanded.

The problems of sources for the first century AD have been well documented and only a brief overview need be made here.¹ The three main authors for the period – Tacitus, Suetonius, and Cassius Dio – clearly made use of those writers who had lived during the reigns of the early emperors, but the extent of the debt to each is difficult to ascertain, especially since it is only rarely that a named citation is provided. The praetorians appear in all three of these authors, to varying degrees, but the references often are incidental, most commonly in passages which record events directly connected with the emperor. It is rare that a passage deals only with the praetorians.² Other sources such as Josephus, the younger Seneca, and the elder Pliny provide occasional glimpses

¹ See, for example, Syme (1958), *passim*; Baldwin (1983), *passim*; Millar (1964), *passim*.

² One such exception is the background provided by Tacitus concerning the construction of the *Castra Praetoria*, but even there, his focus is more on the character of Sejanus than the guard itself; cf. *Annals* 4.2.1.

into the workings of the guard, but without much comment on the significance of the praetorians in the events that they narrate. It is also the case that previous reigns suffered from negative propaganda put out by the new regime, and the praetorians often were caught in this backlash.³

The reigns of the individual emperors each had their own historians, but most of these works are lost.⁴ Of those we have, Augustus' autobiographical *Res Gestae* does not mention the guard at all, though it is possible that general references to *milites* included the praetorians.⁵ The absence from the text of such an important event as the establishment of the guard probably results from Augustus' attempts to downplay the character of his personal troops, evident as well in his reluctance to locate all of the cohorts in Rome initially. Velleius Paterculus, who wrote a concise history of Rome published in AD 30, includes the reigns of Augustus and of Tiberius to the date of publication, but the guard does not figure at all, though the second book contains a lengthy section on Sejanus.⁶ Velleius tends to concentrate on individuals rather than comprehensive

³ For example, rumours after the fire of AD 64 placed the guard in an unfavourable light. Dio records that the soldiers stopped people from rescuing their belongings, but it is likely that these actions were actually part of measures intended to halt the advance of the fire. Cf. Dio 62.17.1. See above, "The Guard in Civil Administration", 186.

⁴ For the reign of Tiberius, for example, we know of works by Aufidius Bassus and Servilius Nonianus, but nothing remains of their histories, and they are not cited in the works that we have.

⁵ Cf. Passerini (1939), 210.

⁶ *Histories* 2.126-31. On the question of whether the discussion of the prefect shows Velleius to be an adherent of Sejanus, or is rather a justification of Tiberius' treatment of him, cf. Woodman (1977), 247-48. See also Sumner (1970), 257-298; Hellegouarc'h (1980), 148-51; Hennig (1975), 133-34; Syme (1986), 436.

discussion of events, but the absence of the praetorians in the section on the prefect is surprising, especially the omission of any reference to their concentration of the praetorians into a single camp, one of the most significant events in the principate of Tiberius, and in the career of Sejanus. Velleius is usually overlooked in any assessment of the reign of Tiberius, however, because of his positive portrayal of the emperor.

For the reigns of the remaining Julio-Claudian emperors, the works of contemporary historians are completely lost, though it is thought that their histories would have provided details for later accounts of the period. One of these first-century historians is Marcus Cluvius Rufus, who narrated the events of the period from Caligula to Nero, and who may have been present at the assassination of Caligula.⁷ His contemporary, Fabius Rusticus, is another whose name is preserved, though we know very little about the work that he produced. He, along with Cluvius Rufus, is cited by Tacitus, as is the elder Pliny.⁸ Biases which would have been present in these authors, for example, as a result of personal friendships or animosity, no doubt were reproduced in the later works, though it is almost always impossible to distinguish these tendencies. One such instance concerns the rumour that Burrus was to be replaced by Gaius Caecina Tuscus; according to Tacitus, the story originated with Fabius Rusticus, who

⁷ Barrett (1990), 168-69.

⁸ See Tacitus, *Annals* 13.19-21; 14.2.1-2; 15.61.2.

wanted to emphasize the role that Seneca had played in the prefect retaining his position, since Seneca and Rusticus were friends.⁹

We do possess some writings from later in the Julio-Claudian period, though these are not histories. The younger Seneca was closely associated with the reign of Nero and a prolific writer, but references to contemporary history in his letters and essays make no mention of the guard for the most part. The Jewish historian Josephus was in Rome during the reign of Nero, but his greatest contribution to the history of the Julio-Claudian period, namely the detailed report of the assassination of Caligula, is a confusing pastiche of detail.¹⁰ He does provide some information about the praetorians and their role in the event, but it is difficult to discern the chronology of, and general reaction to, the murder.

Without question, the best account of the Julio-Claudian emperors comes from Tacitus, who was writing in the early part of the second century AD. His history covered the period from the accession of Tiberius to the end of the reign of Nero, though the loss of the concluding portion of the work means that we do not know the exact end point. The last part of the reign of Tiberius, all of that of Caligula, and the beginning portion of the principate of Claudius are missing.

⁹ Ibid, 13.20.2. See above, "The Guard in Civil Administration", 218-219.

¹⁰ Barrett (1990), 173. Josephus would have made use of the histories of the period that were available to him, and it is probably his lack of synthesis of this material that accounts for the garbled version. On his sources, see Wiseman (1991), xii-xiii.

Despite his claim of impartiality, bias is evident in Tacitus' work, in particular, his dislike of the corruption which he saw imbued the principate, and his account of events should always be considered in light of this prejudice.¹¹

The praetorians appear in Tacitus' work in conjunction with various events throughout the period, though often only in passing. Given the interest of the historian in portraying the events of the early principate in a harsh light, it is perhaps surprising that more was not made of the role of the emperor's personal guard as an instrument of the state. It is impossible to know how much prominence they might have had in the works of his sources. Tacitus gives very few citations and it is often difficult to assess his reliance on their work. One place where we are provided with names of sources concerns the praetorian prefects in the reign of Nero. Tacitus reports two variations concerning the loyalty of Burrus when Agrippina was charged with inciting revolution: Fabius Rusticus recorded that Burrus was to be replaced, but Tacitus notes that neither the elder Pliny nor Cluvius Rufus mention the uncertainty about the prefect's loyalty.¹² More often, however, there is no acknowledgment of the individual

¹¹ The claim to impartiality is found in *Annals* 1.1.6: *inde consilium mihi pauca de Augusto et extrema tradere, mox Tiberii principatum et cetera, sine ira atque studio, quorum causas procul habeo.*

¹² Tacitus, *Annals* 13.20.1. Cf. Syme (1958), 289-90. Other places where authors are cited for the reign of Nero include the question of incest between Agrippina and Nero (*Annals* 14.2.2), and events of the Pisonian conspiracy (*Annals* 15.53.4; 61.3).

works consulted, though there must have been variations in Tacitus' sources on numerous occasions.¹³

Tacitus also used primary sources of information such as the senatorial archives, collections of speeches, memoirs, and eyewitness accounts.¹⁴ One place where there may be vestiges of an oral tradition concerns the Pisonian conspiracy. The historian is well informed about the activities of the praetorian officers who were involved in the plot, and especially the role of Subrius Flavus; he provides the exact words Flavus replied to Nero when he was asked why he had joined the conspiracy.¹⁵ Still, there are sometimes major gaps in the information that Tacitus provides, and one in particular concerns the guard, namely the increase in the number of cohorts from nine to twelve, which seems to have been associated with the construction of the *Castra Praetoria*.¹⁶

A different sort of examination of the Julio-Claudian period is provided by Suetonius, who also published in the early second century.¹⁷ His positions in

¹³ Despite Tacitus' claim that he would provide individual sources where they vary, he does not follow through with his promise; cf. *Annals* 13.20.2: *nos consensum auctorum secuturi, quae diversa prodiderint sub nominibus ipsorum trademus*. Elsewhere Tacitus refers to *scriptores* and *auctores*, always in the plural, and without further reference. Cf. Walker (1952), 139. It has been argued that the reason for the inclusion of the names in the Neronian books is that this section was never revised by Tacitus; cf. Griffin (1984), 235; Syme (1958), 291, note 4.

¹⁴ Syme (1958), 280-86. On the use of memoirs, see Barrett (1996), 198.

¹⁵ Tacitus, *Annals* 15.67.2. Syme (1958), 300 suggests that the information may have come from friends or family.

¹⁶ See above, "Tiberius", 43-47.

¹⁷ For the date, cf. Mottershead (1986), ix.

government under Trajan and Hadrian gave him access to archival materials such as letters and poems, though it is not clear how thoroughly he used them.¹⁸ Suetonius wrote biography rather than history.¹⁹ The *Lives*, therefore, focus more on the individual's actions in events than on the events themselves. The author tended to group together details in a broad framework without regard for chronology.²⁰ As a result, references to the guard are extremely scarce, and usually appear only by chance, though sometimes they are frustratingly tantalizing.²¹

Another historian vital to our understanding of the Julio-Claudian period is Cassius Dio, who composed his work in the early third century.²² Dio provides many details, though often not much analysis of the events he records. He is especially important for his account of the reign of Caligula because of the lacuna in Tacitus, though some of Dio's account – including the final year of

¹⁸ For his career, see Baldwin (1983), 1-65. Suetonius served as a *studiis*, a *bibliothecis*, and *ab epistulis*, probably from 113-122. Cf. Mottershead (1986), vii-ix. One place where Suetonius clearly had made use of the archival information available to him concerns the fall of Sejanus, for he refers to the explanation of the event given by Tiberius in his autobiography; cf. *Tiberius* 61.1.

¹⁹ On ancient biography in Rome, see Baldwin (1983), 66-100. As with the historians, ascertaining the sources which he may have used is difficult; in the *Lives* from Tiberius to Domitian, only five writers are cited, though it is thought that he also would have made use of Fabius Rusticus, Cluvius Rufus and the elder Pliny for those lives which their works covered. Cf. Mottershead (1986), xii; Hurley (1993), viii.

²⁰ Mottershead (1986), xii; Hurley (1993), v.

²¹ See, for example, Suetonius, *Tiberius* 60: two incidents concerning guard members which occurred on Capri and which defy logical explanation. Cf. above, "Tiberius", 51, note 56.

²² Dio was consul in AD 229, and completed his history shortly thereafter.

Caligula's principate – exists only in epitomes from the Byzantine period.²³ It is simply impossible to ascertain which sources were used for the section on the Julio-Claudians, though it is thought that Dio must have known both Tacitus and Suetonius, among others.²⁴ The guard is mentioned frequently by him, and he provides general information about the praetorians that is extremely useful in any examination of their history: details about their strength, numbers, and pay.

The praetorians figured more prominently in the Julio-Claudian period than might be surmised from a preliminary reading of the extant sources. While this lack of detail in the sources can be explained partly by the date at which the authors were writing – the guard having become firmly entrenched in Roman society by the end of the first century AD – a reluctance to promote the activities of such a unit which, by its very existence in Rome, represented the change from the republic to the imperial system may also help to explain why the praetorians are not given as much attention as might have been expected for the emperor's personal guard. The loss of the account of Tacitus for the murder of Caligula is one of the most troublesome gaps in the history of the praetorians, for the motivation and execution of the plot is not well documented in the extant sources. Other events that are not mentioned at all leave us with questions

²³ On these Byzantine epitomators, cf. Millar (1964), 1–4.

²⁴ On Dio's sources in general, see Millar (1964), 34–38. Syme (1958), 690 argues that Tacitus was "at the best, a subsidiary source for Dio", and that Suetonius was not used at all. Most scholars attribute the similarities in the three authors to their use of common sources; cf. Barrett (1996), 204; Griffin (1984), 235. For a detailed comparison of Dio's and Tacitus' use of sources, specific to the year AD 33, see Syme (1983).

regarding intent and public reaction to them, such as the increase in the number of cohorts under Tiberius, or the early history of the unit under Augustus. The gaps in the knowledge of the guard can be partly filled by inscriptional evidence, though the late date of most of this material means that it is of limited use in assessing careers of the praetorians in the 1st century AD. Chance references in authors such as Juvenal and Plutarch also provides some information, but even putting together all the fragmentary evidence, we are left without much of an idea of how the guard was received in the city. It was the nature of the principate to maintain an aura of secrecy concerning several aspects of the workings of the state, and details about the praetorians may have been concealed from the beginning, such as their role in political executions. Although the soldiers must have been a constant presence in Rome as they gained more and more responsibility in civil administration, and their reputation no doubt extended far beyond the walls of Rome, our knowledge of them in the Julio-Claudian period is limited to scant references scattered throughout the sources.

Appendix 2

Republican Terms for the Praetorian Cohort

SOURCE	DATE	COMMANDER	TERM USED
Livy 2.20.5	c496	Postumius	<i>cohorti suae</i>
Livy 29.1.1	205	Scipio Africanus	<i>trecentos iuvenes</i>
Appian, <i>Hisp</i> 84	134	Scipio Aemilianus	ἱλὴν φίλων
Appian, <i>BCiv</i> 1.25	122	Gaius Gracchus	ὑπὸ τῶν συνθεμένων δορυφορούμενος
Sallust, <i>BJ</i> 98.1	106	Marius	<i>turnia sua</i>
Cicero, <i>In Verrem</i> passim	70	Verres	<i>de sua cohorte; ex</i> <i>cohorte praetoria;</i> <i>cohorti praetoriae</i>
Sallust, <i>Cat</i> . 60.5	63	Petreius	<i>cohortem praetoriam</i>
Cicero, <i>Ad Q. f.</i> 1.1.12	59	Q. Cicero	<i>ex cohorte praetoris</i>
Caesar, <i>BG</i> I.40; 1.42	58	Caesar	<i>praetoriam cohortem</i>
Catullus 10.10	57	C. Mummius	<i>nec praetoribus. . . nec</i> <i>cohorti</i>
Cicero, <i>Ad Fam.</i> 15.4.7	51	Cicero	<i>cohorte praetoria</i>
Cicero, <i>Ad Att.</i> 7.2.3	50	Cicero	<i>cohortis praetoriae</i>
Caesar, <i>BC</i> 1.75	49	Petreius	<i>praetoria cohorte</i>
Cicero, <i>Ad Att.</i> 13.52	45	Caesar	<i>a militibus</i>

SOURCE	DATE	COMMANDER	TERM USED
Suetonius, <i>Divus Iulius</i> 86	?	Caesar	<i>custodias Hispanorum</i>
Appian, <i>BCiv</i> 3.40	44	Antony	εἰς ἀφορμὴν φρουρᾶς πλείονος
Appian, <i>BCiv</i> 3.40	44	Octavian	ἐς μόνην τοῦ σώματος φυλακὴν
Appian, <i>BCiv</i> 3.45	44	Antony	στρατηγίδα σπεῖραν
Appian, <i>BCiv</i> 3.46	44	Antony	τοῦ σώματος φρουρά
Appian, <i>BCiv</i> 3.52	43	Antony	1) σπεῖραν βασιλικήν 2) σιδηροφοροῦντες ἄνδρες ἐδορυφόρουν
Appian, <i>BCiv</i> 4.7	43	Octavian, Antony, Lepidus	σὺν ταῖς στρατηγίσιν τάξεσιν
Cicero, <i>Ad Fam.</i> 10.30	43	Antony	<i>cohortis praetorias duas</i>
Appian, <i>BCiv</i> 3.66	43	Octavian	στρατηγίδα τάξιν
Appian, <i>BCiv</i> 3.67	43	Antony	στρατηγὶς τάξις
Appian, <i>BCiv</i> 3.69	43	Octavian	στρατηγὶς ἢ Καίσαρος
Appian, <i>BCiv</i> 3.70	43	Octavian	ἢ στρατηγὶς ἢ καίσαρος ἅπαντα
Appian, <i>BCiv</i> 3.97	43	D. Brutus	σωματοφυλάκων ἱππέων Κελτῶν

SOURCE	DATE	COMMANDER	TERM USED
Horace, <i>Satires</i> 1.7.23-5	43	D. Brutus	<i>cohortem</i>
Appian, <i>BCiv</i> 5.3	42	Octavian Antony	ἐς στρατηγίδας τάξεις
Appian, <i>BCiv</i> 4.115	42	Octavian	στρατηγίδα σπεῖραν
Appian, <i>BCiv</i> 5.24	41	Octavian	περὶ αὐτόν αἱ στρατηγίδες
Appian, <i>BCiv</i> 5.34	41	Octavian	σὺν ταῖς στρατηγίσι σπεῖραις
Appian, <i>BCiv</i> 5.18;20	41	L. Antonius	συλλεγόμενος φρουρὰν τῷ σώματι
Appian, <i>BCiv</i> 5.21	41	Octavian	διὰ τὴν ἀρχὴν δορυφορούμενον
Appian, <i>BCiv</i> 5.59	40	Antony	στρατηγίδες αὐτοῦ τάξεις
Plutarch, <i>Antony</i> 39	36	Antony	τρεῖς στρατηγίδας σπεῖραις
Appian, <i>BCiv</i> 5.95	36	Antony	χιλίοις λογάσι σωματοφύλαξιν
Plutarch, <i>Antony</i> 53	35	Antony	δισχιλίους εἰς στρατηγικὰς σπεῖρας
Tibullus 1.3	31-29	Messalla	<i>cohors</i>
Orosius 6.19.8	31	Octavian	<i>absque cohortibus quinque praetoriis</i>

Appendix 3 The Castra Praetoria

The effective of the praetorian cohorts has caused much controversy. Dio records that they were milliary in his catalogue of the troops under Augustus.¹ But, because the same passage also refers to ten cohorts, which is in conflict with the nine cohorts listed by Tacitus, the evidence for their strength has been dismissed.² Yet, further proof that the praetorians were organized into units of a thousand men may be found in the archaeological remains of the Castra Praetoria, built by Tiberius in the early AD 20s, which housed not only the guard but also the urban cohorts under the Julio-Claudians.

Tacitus records that Tiberius constructed the camp for the praetorians at the urging of Sejanus.³ Since the building record of Tiberius was not extensive and the Castra Praetoria was a major undertaking, the need for the intervention of the prefect is understandable. The reason given by Sejanus for the concentration of the guard into a single location was the improvement of discipline. The billeting of the soldiers throughout the city and surrounding area by Augustus had become impractical, since the responsibilities of the praetorians required that they be able to receive orders as a unit. As a result, by early in the reign of Tiberius, it appears that most of the cohorts had been moved into Rome,

¹ Dio 55.24.6

² Tacitus, *Annals* 4.5.3. See, for example, Durry (1938), 36. But, cf. above, "Tiberius", 43.

³ Tacitus, *Annals* 4.2.1. See above, "Tiberius", 41–42.

though they continued to be scattered throughout the capital.⁴ Although ulterior motives have been attributed to Sejanus for the construction of the camp, namely that it would allow him to have greater control in the city, it is more likely that the report of problems with discipline, and the inefficiency of commanding such a large force scattered throughout Rome, provides the real reason for the construction of the camp. The increase in the number of cohorts is probably also associated with the decision to concentrate them in one place.

Our knowledge of the *Castra Praetoria* itself is fragmentary, though the remains are fairly well preserved.⁵ The excavations have shown that the camp changed very little in its 300-year history. The camp is usually described as a fortress built on a legionary pattern, but the evidence shows that this is not accurate.⁶ In the first century, a standardized plan for legionary fortresses had not yet been fully developed, but even so, the design of the *Castra Praetoria* was unique and its plan had no precedent, nor was it copied.⁷ Despite the difficulty of excavation, the overall plan can be traced from scattered building remains,

⁴ Cf. above, "Augustus", 26-27.

⁵ The reason for the lack of cohesive excavation of the camp is that the area is still a military zone today, and therefore much work has been restricted to salvage excavation. See, most recently, Richardson (1992), 78-79.

⁶ Cf. Nash (1961), 221; Platner and Ashby (1965), 106: "The camp was constructed on the usual Roman model . . ."

⁷ On the development of a fortress plan in the first century, see Johnson (1983), 222-290.

road surfaces and drains which ran down the centre of the streets, though the north end of the camp remains relatively unexcavated.⁸

Situated on one of the highest points around the city, the *Castra Praetoria* was carefully located to guard the northern approaches to Rome. The circuit wall is roughly rectangular in shape, with gates on each of the four sides perhaps intended to evoke triumphal arches.⁹ It is clear that the walls were not expected to withstand attack, for not only are their battlements not conducive to defense, but there is no ditch system in place.¹⁰ The size of the camp is rather small, but the emphasis everywhere is on maximizing the number of soldiers that could be housed there.¹¹ Though the plan of the interior is far from complete, what has been excavated allows some interpretation of the number of the guard and its organization. The layout of the interior space is not at all like legionary camps of the first century. The *Castra Praetoria* is divided by four major streets along its north-south axis into five distinct areas, and is dominated by two rows of barrack blocks, the remains of which run almost the entire length of the camp. A narrow strip down the centre of the camp contains structures arranged around central

⁸ For the plan, see figure 9. Claudius issued coins that depict a stylized exterior of the camp; see figure 4.

⁹ Blake (1959), 15.

¹⁰ Ibid, 14. The camp was intended to evoke a strong military fortress but was not built with defense as a priority.

¹¹ The area of the camp is 16.72 hectares. A typical legionary fortress was 20-25 hectares. Cf. Johnson (1983), 31.

courts and impluvia (A on the plan); these perhaps are centurions' quarters, since there are no large living spaces attached to the barracks themselves.¹² There is no structure that clearly can be identified as the *principia*, nor is there evidence for such buildings as the *praetorium*, hospital, *fabrica*, or baths.¹³ The absence of these typically large buildings is not surprising since the camp was situated so close to Rome, but the implications for the amount of space that could be saved and thus used for housing more troops are important.

One area for which we have evidence is at the major north-south, east-west intersection where the Shrine of the Standards probably was located. A large amount of votive materials was found, which seems to indicate the existence of an area of ritual significance, although there is no indication of a *principia* here, as would be expected (B on the plan). As well, we know from literary evidence that there was a prison in the camp, used for holding defendants, or those condemned to execution.¹⁴ There was also an armoury; in AD 69, the praetorians overreacted to the removal of arms at night by one of

¹² Similar structures were uncovered at the extreme northwest end of the camp, although they were not completely excavated. The absence of evidence of housing for the tribunes and the prefects is easily explained by the proximity to Rome; it is likely that they had quarters in the city.

¹³ Josephus (A/ 18.228) records that, when Agrippa was being held prisoner in the camp, he was allowed to go out to use the baths: καὶ καταλαβὼν ἐν ἐξόδοις ὄντα [Ἀγρίππαν] εἰς τὸ βαλανεῖον. This seems to suggest that there was no such structure in the Castra Praetoria itself, and that the amenities of Rome were used instead. It is also unclear where the games celebrating the anniversary of the accession of Claudius were held, since there does not appear to be an area large enough for such an event within the walls of the camp. It is possible that the event occurred in the *campus* which was adjacent to the camp.

¹⁴ See above, "The Guard as a Specialized Military Unit", 152.

their tribunes, Varius Crispinus, who had been assigned to provide weapons to the 17th urban cohort which had been ordered to move to Rome from Ostia.¹⁵ A structure located in the southeastern corner of the camp, usually identified as a granary, may well be this armoury, for its design better suits the storage of weapons (C on the plan).¹⁶ The remains of the building consist of eight semi-subterranean cells, which had doubled walls to guard against damp, and also had *opus signinum* floors. These cells open onto a hall which leads to a stairway at the east end. The layout of the building and its location in the camp lends support to the idea that this is, in fact, not a granary at all, but the armoury mentioned by Tacitus.¹⁷

Scholars have used the small size of the camp as evidence that the cohorts housed within were quingenary.¹⁸ The archaeological evidence for the barracks, however, reveals that some of these were two-storeyed structures (D on the plan), and led at least one scholar to the conclusion, on the basis of this evidence alone, that the praetorian cohorts were milliary from their inception.¹⁹ These

¹⁵ Tacitus, *Histories* 1.80. Cf. also 1.38. Two inscriptions also mention this building: CIL 6.999; 6.2725.

¹⁶ *Granary*: The Carta Archaeologica di Roma Tavola III identifies building C as a granary, as does Caronna (1993), 253. Since Rome was so nearby, it is unlikely that bulk storage of grain would even be necessary.

¹⁷ Movement of grain into such a storage space would be very difficult because of the stairway and the narrow hall, and the structure itself is placed away from the gates, which would make transport more problematic.

¹⁸ See, for example, Durry (1938), 47; Le Bohec (1994), 21.

¹⁹ Richmond (1927), 13. The barracks, oriented north-south, formed two rows of vaulted cells. Evidence of stairways at regular intervals was found. Cf. Caronna (1993), 253. Since the

barracks are restricted to the western portion of the camp, where there is evidence to suggest two rows of them oriented north-south. The majority of the barracks in the camp, however, are single storey, though these too are peculiar in that they were built back-to-back and without the typical storage area which one associates with legionary *contubernia*. The design was obviously intended to maximize troop numbers within a small amount of space. The unusual method of construction of the circuit wall also provides evidence for the strength of the cohorts housed within, and has not been adequately considered in any discussion of the effective. The walls of the *Castra Praetoria*, unlike any other camp at the time and not seen again until the later empire, were designed with cells for the soldiers. Excavation of the rooms uncovered decorated plaster walls with black and white floors.²⁰

It must be asked why there were two different methods of housing the troops in the *Castra Praetoria*, and why the design for the lodging was unique. Since the camp could have been expanded, it was not entirely a question of space. Most likely the need to downplay the number of soldiers kept near the city, most of whom formed the emperor's personal guard, provides the reason.²¹

excavations were carried out towards the end of the 19th century and reports are sketchy, the exact location of the barracks is not fixed with any certainty. Other double-storeyed barrack blocks are found in the quarters of the *vigiles* in Ostia, dating to the reign of Hadrian, and in the *Castra Nova* in Rome which housed the *equites singulares*, dating to the reign of Severus; cf. Hermansen (1981), 224; Speidel (1994), 128.

²⁰ Richmond (1927), 106. The dimensions of the rooms, at 23.6 square metres, are well within the range of legionary *contubernia*; see Caronna (1993), 253.

²¹ Richmond (1927), 13.

It could also be the case that the different style of barracks divided the praetorian and urban cohorts, a practical consideration given the distinct commands and responsibilities of the troops. An examination of the distribution of soldiers in the camp shows that it is likely that the urban cohorts were quartered in the two-storeyed barrack blocks, while the praetorians occupied the remaining areas. Moreover, the numbers of men that each area could hold provides evidence for the cohorts of both units to have been milliary from the beginning. The best-preserved single-storey barrack contains 34 *contubernia*. At eight men per room, each block would house 272 men. From what has been excavated thus far, there is enough evidence to suggest that there were at least 30 of these blocks, for a total of 8,160 men. The four shorter barrack blocks in the southeast of the camp would hold approximately 204 men each, for a total of 816 men. The two-storey barracks revealed at least 104 *contubernia* per floor; if one assumes another similar group to the west of these, the total is 3,328 men. In addition, there were 82 cells in the north wall and 87 in the east wall. Given an equal number in the south and west walls, with nine more in the corners, the total number of *contubernia* in the walls is 347, or 2,776 men. Therefore, the number of soldiers that could be housed in the camp was approximately 15,000. Thus, the strength of each of the praetorian and urban cohorts was closer to 1,000 men than the 500 postulated in the past, probably averaging 800 soldiers per cohort.²²

²² The effective of the urban cohorts is uncertain, but Fries (1967), 38–42 put it at either five hundred or 1500 men per cohort.

Appendix 4

Confinement and Executions

The following is a list of arrests, confinements or executions in which the guard may have taken part which are additional to those given in the section on confinement and executions above ("The Guard as a Specialized Military Unit", 142-175). In most, there is no mention of the praetorians in the sources, but given the severity of the cases and the prominence of those accused, it is likely that they were involved.

Augustus

Aulus Terentius Varro Murena – executed for allegedly plotting against Augustus (Tacitus, *Annals* 1.10.5)

Marcus Egnatius Rufus – executed for allegedly plotting against Augustus (Tacitus, *Annals* 1.10.5)

Iullus Antonius – executed (or persuaded to commit suicide) for adultery with Julia, daughter of Augustus (Tacitus, *Annals* 1.10.5; 4.44.3; Dio 55.10.15)

Tiberius

Vibius Senecus – brought back from exile to stand trial for treason; slaves tortured; after trial, returned to exile (Tacitus, *Annals* 4.28-30)

Lygdus and Eudemus – slaves who were tortured for evidence regarding the death of Drusus (Tacitus, *Annals* 4.11.2; cf. Suetonius, *Tiberius* 62.1)

Votienus Montanus – charged with slander; the tribune of the fourth praetorian cohort was one of the witnesses; Montanus was banished (Tacitus, *Annals* 4.42.1-2)

Cremutius Cordus – charged with seditious writing, but thought to have

fallen because he incurred the wrath of Sejanus; forced to commit suicide (Seneca, *Cons. ad Marcia* 1.2; 22.4-7; Tacitus, *Annals* 4.34-5; Suetonius, *Tiberius* 61.3; Dio 57.24.2-3)

Mamercus Aemilius Scaurus – charged with treason; forced to commit suicide (Tacitus, *Annals* 6.9.2-4; Dio 58.24.4)

Publius Pomponius – imprisoned and maltreated for treason (Tacitus, *Annals* 5.8.1; Dio 59.6.2)

miscellaneous victims – held in prison and denied contact with others (Suetonius, *Tiberius* 61.4)

Caligula

Avillius Flaccus – former prefect of Egypt; exiled to Andros in 38; assassins sent to kill him a year later (Philo, *in Flaccum* 185-91)

*Antei*us – exiled by Caligula; assassins sent to kill him shortly thereafter (Josephus, *AJ* 19.125)

Claudius

Gaius Appius Silanus – manipulated by Messalina and Narcissus, he was charged with plotting to kill the emperor and executed (Suetonius, *Claudius* 37.2; Dio 60.14.3-4)

Poppaea Sabina – destroyed by Messalina, she was threatened with imprisonment and forced to suicide (Tacitus, *Annals* 11.2.2)

Julia Livilla – sister of Agrippina destroyed by Messalina (and/or Claudius); she was exiled (? to Pandateria), and starved to death (Dio 60.27.4; Suetonius, *Claudius* 29.1)

Nero

Decimus Junius Silanus Torquatus – charged with plotting revolution; his slaves were arrested and he was forced to commit suicide (Tacitus, *Annals* 15.35; Dio 62.27.1)

Figure 1



Sestertius issued by Augustus
Three standards with the legend COHOR. [PRAETORIARUM] PHIL.

Figure 2



Denarius of Antony.
The coin honours his praetorian cohorts and shows a legionary *aquila* between two standards, with the legend C(O)HORTIUM PRAETORIARUM.

Figure 3



Sestertius of Caligula.

On the reverse, the emperor, bareheaded and wearing a toga, stands on a platform and addresses five soldiers, who hold between them four standards.

The legend reads ADLOCVT. COH.

Figure 4



Aureus of Claudius.

On the reverse, the praetorian camp; above, shrine containing military standard and image of *Fides*, seated. The legend reads IMPER. RECEPT.

Figure 5



Aureus of Claudius.

The emperor clasping the hand of a *signifer* of the praetorian guard. The legend reads PRAETOR. RECEPT.

Figure 6



Sestertius of Nero.

The emperor, escorted by a horseman, gallops to the right. The legend reads DECURSIO.

Figure 7



Sestertius of Nero.

The emperor, accompanied by an officer, stands on a low platform addressing three praetorians. The legend reads ADLOCUT. COH.

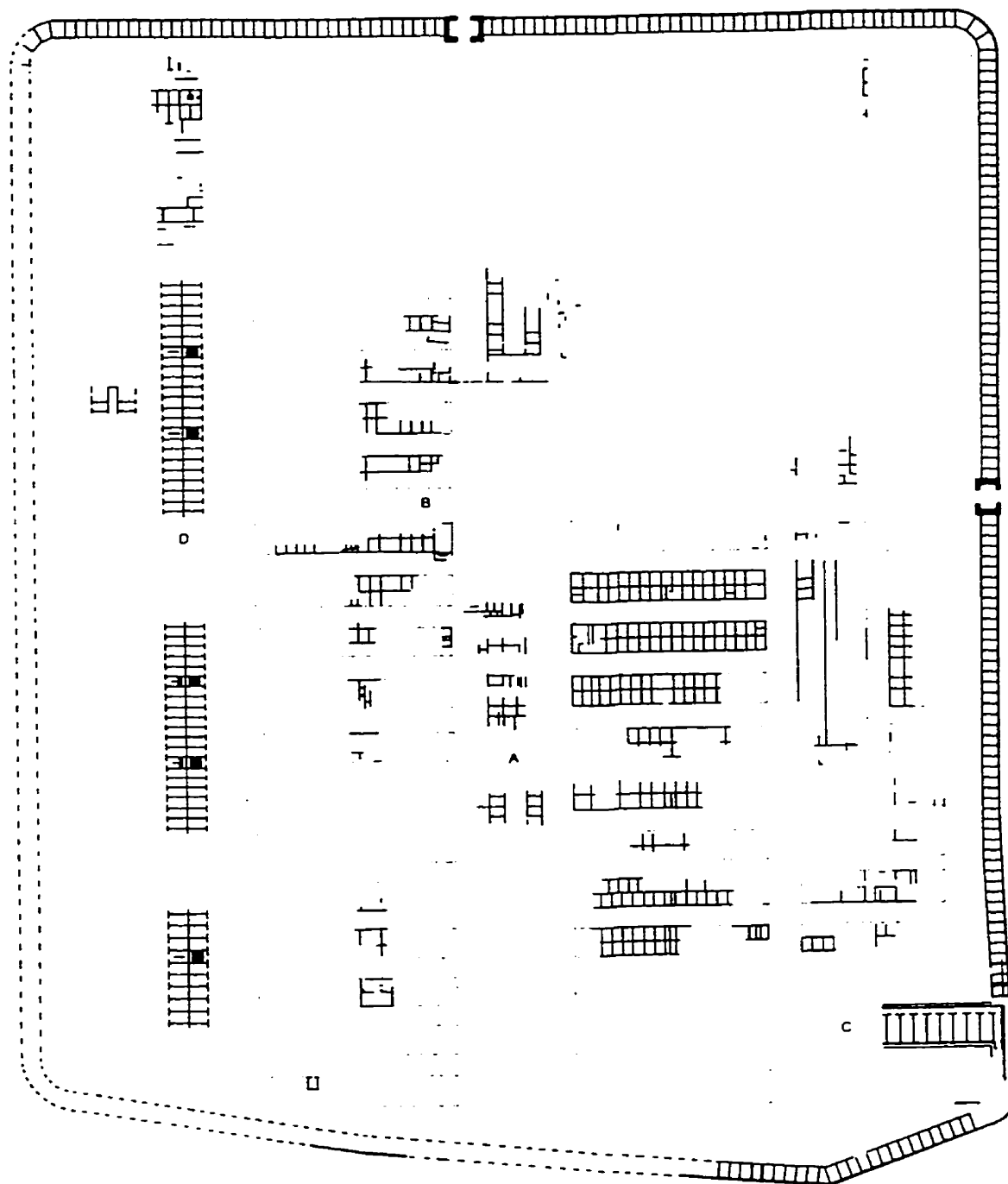
Figure 8



Denarius of Antony.

The coin honours the *cohors speculatorum*, and shows three identical standards. The legend reads C(O)HORTIS SPECULATORUM.

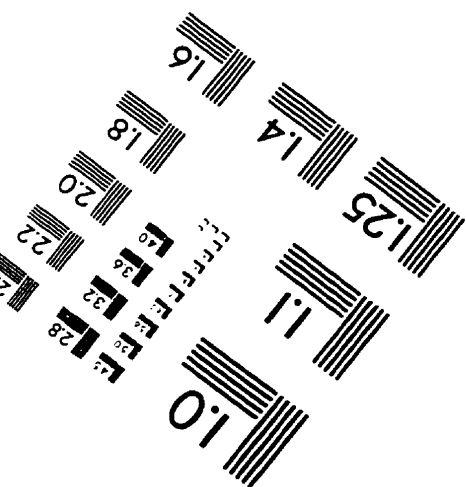
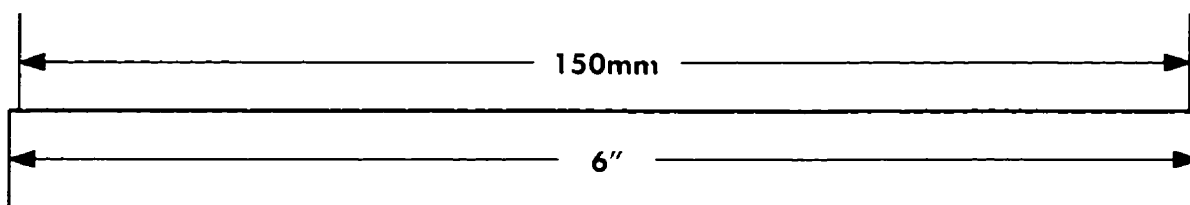
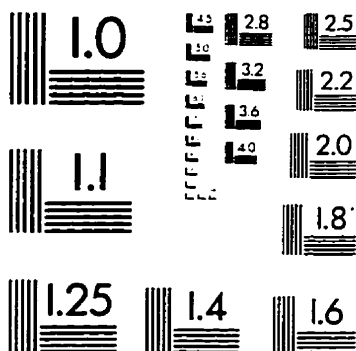
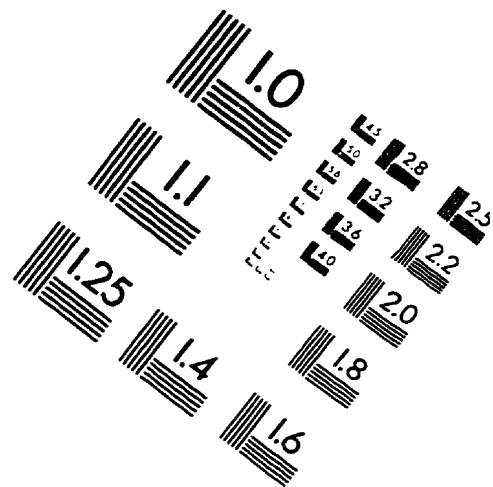
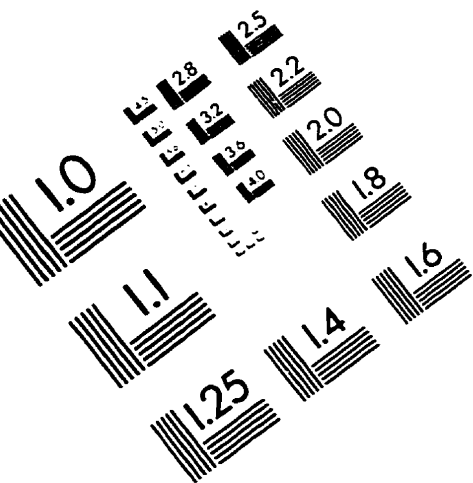
Figure 9



0 50 100m

CASTRA PRAETORIA
(After CAR III)

IMAGE EVALUATION TEST TARGET (QA-3)



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1653 East Main Street
Rochester, NY 14609 USA
Phone: 716/482-0300
Fax: 716/288-5989

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